

THOUGHTS ON INDIAN MYSTICISM

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S A G A R P U B L I C A T I O N S

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INTRODUCTION

MYSTICISM has been described as the individual soul's direct communion with the Universal Soul. When man's spiritual interest shifts from the objective to the subjective, from the brooding on the wonder of the outside world to the meditation on the significance of the self, mysticism will have entered his being. And through a suprasensory and suprarational encounter with the Transcendent, in the fullness of time, he will have realised the objective

The love of God and personal contact with Him are the two features of the cosmic emotion. In a way, mysticism is a reaction against excessive intellectualism and formalism of theology. The mystic sentiment grew out of human aspiration for a personal, direct approach to a more intensive experience of the Ultimate Reality. The goal of mysticism is not a heavenly state of bliss or rebirth in a better world, but freedom from the law of *karma* and identification with the Supreme

Mysticism is not a plaything of a modern dialectician; it is a living, practical tradition that has remained efficient since ancient times. However, we see even educated persons remaining content with a low type of religion-with mere ritualism or the mere knowledge of a sectarian philosophy. They try to be 'religious' without being 'moral', little realising that religious rituals and learning are only

aids and in the absence of pure living and pure thinking all 'religious effort' will be an exercise in futility. The Upanishads disapprove of empty and barren ritualistic religion and relegate sacrificial ceremonies and image worship to an inferior position. The texts affirm that these acts do not lead to final liberation but lead to the 'world of fathers' from which one has to return to earth in due course. When all things are God's, there is no point in offering anything except one's will, one's self-which is a sure means to liberation.

The aim of mysticism is not to take man into heaven but bring heaven into man. The reward for mystic pursuit is spiritual bliss in this very life. It transcends all narrow frontiers of faith or sect-the object being comprehension of the Ultimate through inward contemplation. The gaze has to be fixed on the Light within; lenses must be focused on the Inner Verity. The individual soul being a drop of the Celestial Ocean is also celestial in its essential nature. There is, therefore, a natural urge on the part of the soul to merge with the Ocean. By living a life of renunciation and meditation, man has to elevate his consciousness from the lower centres to the highest spiritual regions in his own body. The mystic experience compensates for the renunciation of the basic pleasures and joys of life on an everyday level-a compensation that is more than adequate. However, renunciation is not running away from one's family or the world. Mysticism insists that life on earth should not be neglected. The *Gita* teaches men to strive for spiritual freedom while living in society and discharging all their duties faithfully.

The origin of the word 'mysticism', scholars say, is from the Greek word *mueo*, meaning 'joining together the edges of a wound'. The accidental split up into a diversity of the original unity warrants a bringing-together of the 'two edges'. Again, the Greek word *musteria*, meaning secret religious rites, refers to the mystery of religious truth which is beyond human understanding. Thus, the meaning of mysticism is man-God unity, the comprehension of which is beyond the human mind. However, mysticism shows the way of spiritual union of man with the Infinite Being. A seeker on the mystic path has to "Pray God in a way that you have a feeling that you are looking at Him; if that be not possible, you feel as if He is looking at you." If the seeker is not loving, humble and devout, he cannot feel that he is looking at God and likewise, he cannot feel that God is looking at him either. Therefore, Divine Love, Unity of Being, Gnosis, Remembrance, Spiritual Guide and spiritual allegiance are suggested to a seeker.

The pathway from imperfect to perfect recognised Truth leads through the valley of reality. In the quest of the Truth, the eye of reason has the same power which a born blind possesses in the perception of colours. The Sufi mystic, Mahmud Shabistri says : "The light of reason applied to the very light of life, is as the eye of the head applied to the sun." It is not possible for a person to become self-knowing and Truth-knowing gnostic by the study of logic and the sciences of dialectics. Reason, probably, guides one as far as the portals of God, but a step further towards Him depends entirely on His grace and mercy. As a gnostic

said : If thou couldst but know thyself as thou shouldst,/ Thou wilt gain the knowledge of the Universe / If thou shouldst care to know the Truth,/Know thyself, not through speculation,/ But through illumination, search and faith./ Be thou own knower, for this is the way to know the Truth

We suffer from a kind of intellectual disdain, a kind of scientific superstition. Our 'rational mind' insists on proof and evidence for mystic truths. Bernard Shaw made fun of the scientist who treated people with contempt for thinking that a million fairies dance in a ray of sunlight, while he himself believed that millions and trillions of molecules dance up and down in a simple drop of boiling water. However, celebrated thinkers have acknowledged the presence of an invisible force which commands, controls and manifests only at its own will.

What Plato had said in his famous statement that man is both a terrestrial tree and a celestial plant that inhabits two worlds-the physical and the spiritual, has been echoed not long ago by Emerson: "Humanity is our actuality but divinity is our potentiality." Modern psychologists have concluded that those who invoke the 'right hemisphere' would get the information 'all at once'. And those who insist on rational explanation of phenomena confine themselves to using the 'left hemisphere' of the brain. Many new developments in science aim at unravelling the mystery contained in the 'right hemisphere' which inspires genius. It is good that some of these wise men have not forgotten the profound statement of Albert Einstein : "I do not arrive at my understanding of the funda-

mental laws of the universe through my rational mind. ...The cosmic religious experience is the strongest and noblest mainspring of scientific research."

A state of inner stillness which is conducive of realisation of Truth within one's own self can be accomplished only through the loving guidance of a Guru. The "science" of mysticism can be taught by an "experienced professor". The path towards the Ultimate then becomes a life of devotional surrender of the seeker to the manifested form of the divine Lord, the Sadguru. Every thought, emotion, word and deed becomes an act of sacrifice directed towards the Sadguru. This unrestrained devotion brings liberation. The Indians call it the Bhakti Yoga, the Christians mysticism and the Muslims Sufism. The mystic pursuit consists of initiation by a Perfect Master who links a seeker's consciousness with the indwelling Divine Sound. The perception of the Celestial Melody is equated with self-realisation, merger of the individual soul with the Universal Soul. A devout seeker can enjoy the bliss of direct communion with the Infinite everyday during meditation; thereby he can conquer his mind and fear of death too.

Mysticism in my life : Some twenty years ago one wintry Sunday morning a unique thing happened in my life. I was sitting in a vast assembly in the western part of the city of Delhi listening to a 'religious discourse'. The bearded 'speaker' did not pull punches, nor ever raised his voice. There was no conscious attempt to impress his audience. But the mellow grace of style, the loving persuasiveness of thought did make an impact on me. The great

charisma of his personality overwhelmed me. His words began reverberating in my whole inner environment. I sat glued to the ground allowing my life's beliefs and convictions to be shaken rudely. The study and recitation of religious texts, the periodic visits to temples and holy places, the occasional *pujas* and *havans*, were these only futile exercises? Won't these give me spiritual solace?

As the discourse progressed, many more questions hit in my face. What was the real integral message of the scriptures? And what did it mean to an individual in real terms? Could one attain to God on his own, unaided? Doubts, inhibitions galore. When the discourse concluded, it was not a moment too soon or, too late. No questions were asked, yet no doubts were left uncleared. I experienced a feeling of a dew-drenched flower-fresh, contented, divine. Was he the person to instruct, guide and lead me on the path of spirituality?

A sparkle of awareness kindled in me. I began reflecting on the true meaning of the religious literature I had read. I began realising the significance of Sankaracharya's pronouncements in the *Vivekachudamani* like, *Durlabham traya mevai taddaiva-nugrahanu hetukam! Manushyatvam mumukshatvam mahapurusha samsrayah* (1:3) meaning, there are three extremely rare boons man obtains by the special grace of the Almighty-birth in a human body, yearning for liberation from the prison-house of the world and, guidance of a Great Soul to attain the objective. The true meaning of the verses I had been reciting since I do not know when that the Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu and Maheswara and verily, the supreme Parabrahma; that the

the Guru is the mother, father, friend and guide and the source of all Knowledge and Wealth, and; that neither penance nor pilgrimage, neither scholarship nor erudition but only the service of a Guru can help one to attain spiritual progress. The *Vasishta Ramayana* mentioned that equanimity, discrimination, contentment and company of saints are the four keepers of the 'door of liberation' and that one must make a beginning by acquiring atleast one of these qualities by conscious effort which would lead one through the other faculties. The best thing is first to acquire the company of a saint. The text also stated that just as administration of medicine today cures yesterday's ailment, man's previous *karmic* load could be cleared by receiving today initiation from a Perfect Master. The competence of the doctor and the efficacy of the medicine he prescribed is known to the world only through a patient who is cured.

The more I heard of the path and the more I read about practical mysticism, the deeper I was drawn into it. It became clear to me that the path is common to all faiths—the quintessence of universal spirituality. Known as the *Surat Shabda Yoga*, the yoga of the audible life-stream, it has been the most efficacious way to attain to the Lord's abode. Only a Perfect Living Master can teach the mystic method and help lift the soul from its point behind the two eyes. This eye-center is variously called the *Shiva netra*, *Divya chakshu*, *Single eye*, *Nuqta-i- swaida*. Vegetarianism, total abstinence from alcohol, honest living and daily meditation are the four essential disciplines for a seeker. The saintly person who made me aware

of the nature of Reality and the path to the attainment of that Reality, took me into His fold and blessed me with initiation. His name is : Maharaj Charan Singh, the Sant Sadguru of the Radhasoami Satsang Beas.

This yoga was propounded by Swamiji Maharaj (Shri Shiv Dayal Singh of Agra) in the year 1861. Just as other saints addressed God as Rama, Jesus, Buddha, Allah and Wahi Guru, Swamiji called the Supreme Being *Radhaswami*—Radha is the individual soul and Swami is the Paramatma. *Radha adi surat ka nam/ Swami ad shabd nij dham* meaning, Radha is the Primal Soul's name and Swami the original word of God. The mystic path of Radhaswamis has nothing to do with the Radha-Krishna cult. The path insists that one need not renounce his family or world in order to enter the realm of spirituality. One has to attend to his duties honestly and diligently, keeping his mind always in the thought of God. Baba Jaimal Singh, a dear disciple of Swamiji, founded the Radhasoami Satsang Beas in 1891 at his Guru's behest to propagate the spiritual discipline in the Punjab

The second Sadguru Maharaj Sawan Singh spread the mystic message far and wide during nearly fifty years of Mastership. Simple and kind, the Great Master, as he was endearingly addressed by millions of his disciples, added a new dimension to spiritual leadership by bringing the esoteric teachings within the comprehension of common people. His multi-volume *Guru Mat Siddhant* is a great work which expounds the philosophy of saints from the point of view of all world religions. A man of exemplary devotion to duty and an ideal disciple

of Maharaj Sawan Singh, Maharaj Jagat Singh (1948-51) guided the company of seekers as the third Guru.

The present Master and my own spiritual mentor, Maharaj Charan Singh took charge of the mystic university at Beas (near Amritsar) on 4 November 1951. He is the living ideal to his vast and ever-expanding company of seekers. He lives a humble life, earning his living through farming. Ever since I have been an initiate, the Sadguru has been my constant guide and protector in my endeavour to acquire an egoless and passionless frame of mind. He does not perform magic or miracles and keeps me away from this and other kinds of material allurements.

I am aware that yet I am only at the beginning of things. But the ice has been broken and water has begun to flow. Further progress is only a matter of time-how soon that time comes depends on how earnest and determined I can be. In listening to the Sadguru regularly, in trying to know more about His inner nature, my life's ambition is being fashioned; the fulfilment of the ambition is through love and devotion. While trying to understand the universality of the Sadguru's teaching, I have read the sacred books of many religions as well as commentaries on the texts. I made copious notes of whatever I read and this book is, by and large, an expanded version of the notes. Therefore, it can be called a collection of thoughts on mysticism. But why 'Indian mysticism' in the title, one may ask. My submission is that my basic inspiration is Indian mysticism although wherever possible I tried to refer to non-Indian systems too.

The book is intended only for the general reader who desires to know the basic elements of mysticism, particularly the mysticism of Divine Sound. I have deliberately adapted a simple and informal style for this purpose. Some may find the ideas wholly repetitive but I have again followed the accepted convention of stressing points of significance. In the Upanishads, in the Prajna Paramita Sutras and in many other sacred texts of the world recurrence of ideas is common. Repetition is usually considered quite desirable so that students may go over the same ideas again and again as their habit of pondering often leads to intuition.

I have attempted to write the book under the constant divine grace and inspiration of my Sadguru Maharaj Charan Singh. I seek His blessings for the work. My revered friend and former vice-chancellor of Patiala University, Shri Kirpal Singh Narang and Prof J.R. Puri and Shri Veerendra Sethi have greatly enhanced the usefulness of the book by making significant suggestions. Shri G.V.G. Krishna Murty and Shri T.V Siva Rao, my dear friends, with whom I discussed the theme and its treatment at length helped to widen the scope of the book. I am grateful to all of them.

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WHAT IS MYSTICISM

GANDHIJI was once asked which, according to him, was the most significant text of our treasure of spiritual literature. Here was his reply. 'Throw away all your spiritual literature in the sea, but save the Upanishads. Throw away all the Upanishads, major and minor, save the *Ishavasya Upanishad*. Throw away if you will, the complete text of this Upanishad too but save only the first stanza for it is this *shloka* which presents the cream, the quintessence of the entire Indian philosophy.'

What is that significant verse that inspired Gandhiji to say what he did? The meaning of the first two verses - let us take the second verse also to make the message complete: Everything in the universe abides in the Supreme Being. Realise this well, and, realising it, cast off the desires that rise in the mind like, the thought of possessing what is enjoyed by another. Joy comes only by the giving up of desires and attachments. You may live the longest life, doing work in a detached spirit and dedicating everything to God. Thus only can we escape the contamination of work and sterilize life*.

* Isavasyamidam sarvam yatkimca jagatyam jagat/Tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gridhah kasyasvidhanam
Kurvanneveha karmani jivishacchatam samach/Evam tvayī nanya thetosti na karma lipyate nare—Isavasya Upanishad

This is the greatest teaching any religion, any philosophy can give. This says that what is created is surrounded by the Almighty, and what is created is for our use only during our sojourn in this phenomenal world. That means—the riches we amass, the comforts we command, the luxuries we acquire, are to be enjoyed as if we enjoy hired furniture. This again means that we should live in this world and enjoy the human life given to us by the Almighty with the awareness that nothing that is material belongs to us in reality. We must cultivate a sense of detachment and non-involvement. Our ancients have given the beautiful analogy of the lotus flower which though born out of mud and slush keeps itself above the untidiness of its surroundings.

The emphasis on detachment given by our ancient sages has caused confusion among some people who misconstrued the whole idea as that that our philosophy preaches *inaction* and *indifference* to the worldly activities. But when saints explain to us the underlying message, all misconceptions must disappear. We know that insofar as the Hindu philosophy is concerned the *Bhagavad Gita* is referred to as the main text of Vedanta. Does the *Gita* preach inaction? Does Bhagavan Krishna who pronounces the Vedantic message to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra preach indifference? Far from it. When Arjuna, looking at his own kith and kin all around, fights shy to wield his bow, the Lord explains to him the reality of things and prepares him to *action*. It is then that Arjuna fights. Therefore, it is not true that saints preach inaction; they

preach action. They preach not indifference but awareness. The saints only remind us that this is not the permanent home of man and that the things man enjoys here are not permanent.

Then what is permanent? To understand what is permanent and what is eternal, we must also know what is unreal and what is untrue. As we are told, all that is created is transient and impermanent. Cultivating love and attachment to non-permanent things causes grief, pain and suffering. The Buddha said that desires are the basic cause of suffering because through desire of wealth, comfort and position man gets entangled in the worldly mesh. Developing love and attachment to one's own kith and kin causes grief because life in this world is temporary. When a woman who had lost her child approached the Buddha for restoration of his life, the Enlightened One made her realise the significant fact that men are born to die. He asked the woman to collect a few mustard seeds from a household which had never known pain or suffering. The woman tired herself going around the town knocking at each door. She returned empty-handed. She had known now that there was not a single house which had not known pain or suffering.

But saints tell us that life is not after all a long journey of agony and suffering. If one grieves for a week, he may soon be happy for a couple of weeks. If a man suffers for one year, he may enjoy life for a half-year. Because it is always the sense pleasures which bring us grief or happiness. Saints tell us that the impermanent things causing sometimes happiness, but mostly grief, can be

shunned and man can look forward to eternal happiness by controlling his senses, his mind and by severing his attachment.

Saints tell us that man is a part of Superman aeons ago. Having left his heavenly abode and having got into the seemingly unending cycle of births and deaths, he lost his way and craved for divine solace and thus he has reached the human birth, which Christianity calls 'top of the creation.' It is only in human birth that all the five elements - *tattwas* - water, fire, air, ether, and earth, are in full activity. Therefore, man has the capacity to comprehend not only the mystery of God's creation but also to seek to attain to Him. The *Kathopanishad** describes the body as a chariot, the intellect as charioteer and the mind as the reins. The *Shvetaswatara Upanishad*** mentions that the great spirit is always dwelling in the beings of all and that there is absolutely no distinction between the individual soul and the eternal soul.

The inner soul is as immortal and as indestructible as the universal soul. The *Gita* says that this body is the field and the one who knows this is called the knower, i.e. whatever there is that belongs to man, is within his body; whatever he has to do, he should do within the field of his body i.e., all that is noble can be known only within this human body. The same truth is echoed

* Atman rathinam viddhi sarira rathameva tu/Buddhi tu sarathi viddhi manah pragrahameva ca

** Eko devah sarabhuteshu gudah saravyapi sarva-bhutantaratma/Karmadhyakshah sarvabhutadhivasah sakshi cetah kevalo nirgunasra

by Christian, Muslim and Sikh saints. Saint Mathew describes how one can acquire the knowledge by going inside his body (6 : 6). The *Granth Sahib* says, the temple of God is the body, from which come out the genuine rubies of knowledge. The Muslim texts have spoken that Allah can be perceived only within one's own self. "You cannot see God in *Kanz* or *Hidayah*, look into the mirror of your heart, for there is no book better than this."

In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (7 : 1) there is an interesting dialogue between Sanatkumara and Narada. Narada approaches Sanatkumara and says, 'Sir, teach me'. Then the Guru asks him to tell him what he had known so that he would teach him what is beyond that. Narada says 'I know the four *Vedas*, the *Itihasa Puranas*, the science of numbers, the science of portents, the science of time, the science of logic and the sciences of elemental spirits and stars. But sir, with all this I am only a knower of words and not of the Self, I have heard from holy men like you that he who knows the Self crosses over sorrow. I am in sorrow, please help me.' This shows that knowledge of the self is not attainable through learning of sciences but by 'going within' one's own body. Swami Vivekananda says: 'You may invent an image through which to worship God but a *living image* already exists, that is the *living man*, that is you. A human body is the ensouled body, the individualised infinite.'

` This is what saints of old taught us. How to realise the Self? What is the shape of that Self? What is the quality of the Self? Here again

saints tell us that Self is Sound; it reverberates inside each human body. It is *Onkara* to Hindus, the *Word* to the Christians, the *Kun* to the Muslims, the *Shabda* to the Sikhs. It is this Sound, the only true and permanent feature, which is the creator of the entire creation. Ancient saints who had experienced the sweetness of this Divine Sound have told us that it is sweeter than the sweetest things in this world.

It is one thing to read and acquire learning of what the ancients have said about the Self manifested in Sound and it is quite another to acquire the knowledge of the Self ourselves. How can we accomplish this? It is common knowledge that our people seek spiritual benefit by reciting the holy books day in and day out, by attending religious discourses or by visiting holy places. It becomes futile to seek God outside one's own body when the Supreme dwells within

Kabir says : 'Learning makes you in all truth a heartless stone; love of God is not born of books.' The Buddhist text *Dhammapada* says : "What does a spoon know about the taste of the delicious food it conveys?" To put it more simply, just by studying the route map of a country one cannot reach there or by mere mastering the topography of a place, one cannot reach there.

Learning promotes logic and argument and we get into doctrinal controversies which are prejudicial to inward peace. Sankaracharya talks of some questions which do not deserve to be answered. He says there are four kinds of questions : 1. Some can be answered definitely :

Will everyone who is born die? 'Yes' is the decisive answer. 2. Some questions can be answered by resort to division: Is every one reborn after death? Any one free from passions is not reborn, while who is not so is reborn. 3. Some questions can be answered by counter questions: Is man superior or inferior? The counter question is In relation to what? If in relation to animals, he is superior, if in relation to realised souls, he is not. 4. There are questions which require to be set aside: Are the aggregates the same as the Soul? None can answer such a question. Because the Soul is a mystery which sets a limit; it is a mystery before which words turn back and mind fails to find.

The Buddha had a disciple by name Malunkya-putta who was dissatisfied with his Master because he would not answer some metaphysical questions. The disciple challenged Buddha and said, 'If the Lord answers them I will lead a religious life under him. If not, I will give up religion and return to the world. If the Lord does not know the answer, I welcome his saying so.' With extreme courtesy, the Buddha said he did not offer to answer the question, and gave a parable: A man is hit by a poisoned arrow. His friends call in a doctor who tries to draw out the arrow from the wound. The wounded man, however, cries, 'Stop, I will not have the arrow drawn out until I know who shot it - whether a woman or a man, a *brahmin* or a *shudra*, whether he was tall or short.' What would happen? The man would die before all his questions were answered.

There is another story of a pandit who offered

to discourse on the *Bhagvad Gita* to a king. The king asked · ‘Have you read the *Gita* thoroughly?’ The brahmin said ‘yes’. The king asked him to go back and read the *Gita* once more. The brahmin did likewise and returned to the king saying that he had mastered the text and would be able to explain to him in all its aspects. Upon this the king advised the brahmin to study the *Gita* again and again. The brahmin was annoyed at the king’s insistence on the study of the *Gita* again and again in spite of his assertion of scholarship of the text. Since he was dealing with the king of the land he could not say anything. He went back to study the *Gita* again. The king who waited for the brahmin to return, never saw him in his court. He then found out where the brahmin was residing and reached his door. ‘Why, my dear pandit, why have you not come to me again?’ The brahmin smiled, meaningfully. We know why the brahmin smiled. The *Gita* is not a text which is to be discoursed about or to be lectured upon. The understanding of the *Gita* lies in translating the message contained therein in action. It is, therefore, the spiritual experience that matters and not the textual erudition.

In his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, Sankaracharya recounts that the teacher, when requested to explain the nature of the Self, kept silent and to the repeated enquiries of the pupil gave the answer: ‘Verily I tell you, but you understand not, the Self is silence, the Self is to be realised.’ That means that the eternal truth has no word for its expression. The absolute is free from the predicates of existence because where one

cannot speak, there one must be silent and one must set himself on the journey to realization. It is well said that Truth is a sacred achievement and not a plaything of the dialectician.

Now, when man begins wondering at the grandeur of the universe, at the mystery of creation in all its myriad variety, then comes the realization—how insignificant, how infinitesimal his place is, how meagre is his capacity to comprehend the Divine Law. After all, he is imprisoned in a cage of bones, flesh and skin, held fast to the earth, pressed down by the weight of the atmosphere, bound down by the laws of nature, a slave of desires, as weak as a bird without wings and feathers, relying only upon the severely limited faculties of sight, smell, hearing etc. and depending upon the intellect confined to the limits of three dimensions. How miserable : In bondage he is born, in bondage he has been brought up and in bondage will he die. That marks the exit from one of the innumerable births. How pitiable ! Can he ever overcome the forces which are keeping him tied down to this earth ? Can he ever seek an end to the pain and suffering of endless deaths and births ?

Here comes a message of cheer, a word of comfort. Whenever mother earth becomes heavy with the burden of evil, suffering and misery with the disappearance of truth, beauty and goodness, the Supreme Being appears amidst us in a human form to lead us from this phenomenal world to our original home. In the *Gita*, the Lord says . 'When goodness grows weak, when evil increases, I make myself a body. In every age I come back

to deliver the holy, to destroy the sin of the sinner, to establish *dharma*.¹ God descends on this earth not because of any need on His part, but because of the need of the mankind. As the divine souls are here on a mission they are eager to fulfil their duty which has prompted a western seeker to say : 'the saint showers his mercy to deliver men from the snares of this world as if by not doing so his prestige would suffer grievously, as if his honour is at stake.' The chief reason, says St. Bernard, which prompts the invisible God to become visible in flesh and to hold converse with men is to lead carnal men - who are only able to love carnally - little by little to spiritual love. God desires that we may learn from the divine soul who appears amidst us and emulate his example.

Confucius says that sincerity is the way of heaven; the attainment of sincerity should be the way of men. Sincerity is that whereby self-completion, self-perfection is achieved. It is only the God-inspired souls who can show the way to the attainment of self-perfection. As a Christian saint put it : 'God becomes man so that man may become God.'

The God-sent souls live amidst us a humble and simple life as it is said in the Book of Mirdad :

The truly high is ever low

The truly swift is ever slow

The highly sensitive is ever numb

The highly eloquent is ever dumb.

Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhavati Bharata,
Abhyuthanamadharmasya tadatmanam Srijamyaham.
Paritranaaya sadhunam vinasaya ca dushkritam
Dharmasansthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge.

Taoism of China describes a sage in these words : 'He does not display himself, therefore, he shines. He does not approve himself, therefore, he is noted. He does not praise himself, therefore, he has merit. He does not glory in himself, therefore, he excels.'

It is not possible for us to recognise a person living amidst us as a divinely inspired soul. However, saints and men of wisdom have tried to picture the divine personality in so many ways. Confucius describes the qualities of a perfect master : 'He who shows himself quick in apprehension, clear in discernment, of far reaching knowledge, of all-embracing knowledge, magnanimous, generous, benign, mild, energetic and enduring, fitted to command reverence, distinctive, concentrative and ever searching.' And Confucius exclaims . 'Call him man in his ideal, how earnest is he . Call him an abyss, how deep is he . Call him heaven, how vast is he.'

Saint Namdev describes the qualities of a True Guru in these words . 'You can know a saint by his indifference to worldly life, his perennial love, his incessant remembrance of God's name, his humanity, his constant divine contemplation, his effacement of egoism, his disregard of money, his absence of sensuousness and anger, his peace and forgiveness and his eagerness to show men the path of devotion.'

As we have just seen, our greatest difficulty is how to recognise a Godman. We fail miserably if we try and select a Guru. There are gurus and gurus. I am reminded of an interesting story. Once a guru came to a village where he was received well

by the people who believed him to be a saintly soul. According to the tradition, each day a house-holder invited the guru to his place and offered hospitality. One day after the guru had had his sumptuous and wholesome meal and was relaxing, a villager attending on him addressed the guru in all humility and earnestness : 'Swamiji, we are indebted to you for your visit to this humble village. Now will it please you to take the *Gita* ? Upon that the 'Guru' said, 'I am pleased with your devotion, but, you know, I have just had my meal; I cannot take the *Gita* now. My belly is full, you may offer that a little later. An ignoramus and an imposter, the guru thought the *Gita* too was a dish being offered to him! If we set out to search for a divine soul, we will only end up in frustration because, we are enveloped by darkness; we are in darkness. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* our ancients prayed: *Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya*-lead us from darkness to light; it is a prayer to lead us from suffering to happiness-from *klesha* to *ananda*. And the ancient sages said that it is only a Guru who can lead us out of the morass. 'Gu' is darkness and 'ru' is light which means, light in darkness, or the one who leads us from darkness to light, from *asat*, unreal and impermanent, to *sat*, the true, real and eternal. The *Kathopanishad* says that in order to attain self-knowledge, one must kneel before a Guru. And Guru is God in human form.

Right from our childhood we have been reciting the verse : *Gururbrahma, Gururvishnu, Gururdevo maheshwarah; Gurursakshat parabrahma, tasmai shriguravenamah*. This says that the Guru represents the Trinity-creator, preserver and destroyer and is

verily the creator of the Trinity. Thus, it is clear that God comes to live amidst us as a human being so that we can listen to him, learn from him, befriend him, love him and emulate him. God longs as urgently for us as we for him. As one Christian saint said 'Let us dare to be *divine* since God has desired to be *human*. However, since we are unable to identify him, recognise him, he himself comes to us, searching for us at the opportune time. Jesus has said that he has come into the world to collect the marked souls.

Once we are spotted by a perfect master, we have nothing to fear. He lifts us and keeps us on the path of spiritual progress. Then he says 'He who approaches near to me one span, I will approach to him one cubit; he who approaches near to me one cubit, I will approach near to him one fathom; he who approaches me walking, I will come to him running.'

Here we must remember one very important point. The teacher in history, however great he might be, cannot help a disciple who desires spiritual uplift. The preceptor must live amidst us, to guide us at every stage of our spiritual journey. It is just like an ancient physician not capable of curing the ailment of a person *today*. This is not to decry or belittle the great masters of the past. Their life and work give us great inspiration and encourage us to emulate them. But for actual journey on the path today, we require the kindly guidance of a living perfect master.

According to the Indian tradition, a spiritual teacher is the *Sant Sadguru* who is the embodiment of all that is noble in humanity, and all that is

great in spirituality. It is the highest state to attain which even the gods yearn and crave, as can be seen in the religious texts of all the faiths of the world. It is said that if God gets angry with us, a Sadguru can redeem us; but if the Sadguru is displeased, God just cannot come to our help. But when we are chosen by a master it should be our endeavour to please him by strictly translating the teachings in practice.

The Sant Sadguru, as it is traditionally said, bestows three boons on the chosen disciples : *Deeksha*, initiation; *Siksha*, instruction and; *Moksha*, salvation. The Guru tests the disciple to find out whether he is in a fit condition of mind to receive initiation. (Fitness includes strict vegetarianism, keeping away from alcoholic drinks and living by honest means.) He satisfies himself with regard to the genuine desire of the seeker to receive spiritual guidance.

Now, about the word *Deeksha*-‘Dee’ means, granting of knowledge and ‘ksha’ means eradication of the impurities clinging to the individuals. The initiation was called ‘investiture’ in ancient India and is still regarded so holy that it has acquired the significance of *second birth*. An initiate automatically earns divine protection and starts on a new life. Through *Siksha* the Sadguru gives us the necessary instruction and training for progress on the spiritual path. As *Moksha Guru* or *Jnana Guru* the Sadguru reveals to the disciple the esoteric secret of the purpose of human birth and, leads him into the final beauty, the eternal bliss.

Let us try to understand the content and significance of initiation. Initiation is variously descri-

bed as *upadesa* or *namdan*. Saints have repeatedly emphasised that initiation consists of the Prasad of Nama. An initiate has to repeat the holy name ceaselessly and meditate on the sacred form of the Sadguru who has initiated him. Saint Namdev declares that there is no other means than that of the *nama* granted by a Sadguru to reach God. He deprecates all other means as futile and suggests that *nama-smarana* is the only rescue from the bonds of existence. It induces introspection and the consequent discrimination leads to spiritual progress.

Saints tell us that in each *yuga* God prescribes a particular vehicle for the spiritual restoration of people. In this age, the vehicle is the *nama*. And rightly Guru Nanak sounds a warning: *Kalu aya Kalu aya nam bowo, nam bowo*—which means that Kali is on us, cultivate the divine name and ever live in the remembrance of the Supreme Being. The Guru explains the power of *nama-smarana*: The earth and the sky and all the created things have been created by the power of *nama* and *nama* is the supporter of everything. Wherever *nama* is everything else is.

The same message is given by every religion. It signifies the negation of the conceptual 'I' or the ego, and heralds the death of the conditioned psyche and the birth of a new freely-seeing awareness. Initiation, therefore, is verily a rebirth in which man begins the journey to become Man, full Man, a complete Man.

In order to take the fullest advantage of initiation, saints suggest regular early morning meditation which is described as *Amritvela*, the time of

elixir. However, our attention is spread all over the world through the senses. Pride, ego, desire and anger are the Himalayan hurdles on our path.

Unless we control these senses, we cannot concentrate on the holy form of the Sadguru repeating the Lord's name; unless we sit in meditation we cannot control the sprawling mind. In this Hobson's choice, let us remember that in spritual pursuit, Bhakti Yoga is the only method through which God can be obtained. God can be realised through total surrender to the will and command of the Sadguru. With all the frailty of our phenomenal being, with all our sensuous and sensual attachments, with all our proud, egocentric and lustful attitudes, it is just not possible to keep the mind in check. Therefore, the only and easy thing for us to do is to fall at the feet of the master and offer ourselves in total dedication to him and leave the rest to his will.

Many are the instances in the history of world religions which speak of how love and devotion have succeeded in bringing God into the lives of men and women. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, Krishna tells *gopis* : 'You surrendered everything to me; you shattered all worldly bonds and became completely free from physical desires and wants. Your love binds me; I am indebted to you. I will not be able to redeem myself even after a life-long service to you.' In the *Gita*, the Lord says: 'He who devoutly worships me, with his mind focussed on me, is considered by me the best of *yogis*. The *Supreme Purusha* is attainable only by exclusive devotion. However, we know of love and devotion only as cold expressions, not as warm experience. Only

those divine lovers can tell us its true nature. Only those, like Jesus Christ, who got on to the cross with a smile on his face, with love in his heart; only those, like Mirabai, who drank the cup of poison as if it is nectar with extreme trust in the Lord, or like Guru Arjun Dev who willingly sat on a hot frying pan saying, 'Whatever you do for me, is acceptable to me', can picture its true features.

Saints tell us that incessant tearful remembrance of the Lord and pining for his *darshan* is love. Maulana Rumi says: 'That eye is fortunate which sheds pearls of tears in remembrance of the Lord; that heart is fortunate which burns itself in the separation from the Lord.' Again he says: 'If I want to utter his name, I fear my tongue may get burnt but if I do not, my heart may be reduced to ashes in the fire of separation from my Lord.'

The Maharashtrian saint Jnana Dev gives us a tip: 'Love, and everything will be added on to you.' Love is the life breath of communion which polarises itself into the lover and the Beloved. The lover thus becomes his own Beloved. The one becomes two—the two in one. This is the wondrous dynamics of love, of dissolving duality into non-duality.

Love of the Sadguru can be fostered through attending the *satsangs* (spiritual discourses) regularly. *Satsang* tells us of the immense power, illimitable grace and unbounded mercy of the Supreme Being living amidst us as Sadguru. We know that *Sat* is true and *Sang* is company or association and *satsang* means the company or association with that which is true.

Satsang is a must to devotees because it presupposes a certain state of mind on the part of the

seekers-a pure life, an honest life and a loving and lovable life. In Indian ethics there are two aspects explained—*Priya*, that which pleases us to hear, and *Hita*, that which is good for us but may not please us. The Sadguru asks us to shun worldly pleasures because they are not permanent, to shun evil ways of life because they perpetrate our *karmic* load, to drive away egoistic and proud thoughts because they blur our view of things. Saints tell us that *satsang* is a sort of fence around our life of spiritual research and *shabda* practice. Guru Nanak says 'God's wealth is earned in the company of the holy. Where God is remembered there he goes as a friend and helper.'

In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, it is mentioned that noble thoughts are given to the society (*satsang*) in which God's glory is heard and recited. The Buddhists recite the *Tri Saranas*. One is *Sangham Saranam Gachhami*. That is, the society of the disciples should be my refuge—because in the sangharama, the Buddhist monastery, the subject of talk always is how to seek enlightenment, how to traverse the path to deliverance, as explained by the master. By constant exposure to the thoughts of the master, seekers grow love and devotion to the Sadguru.

We know the famous verse by Sankaracharya:

Satsangatve nissangatvam

Nissangatve nirmohatvam

Nirmohatve nishchalatatvam

Nishchalatatve jeevanmuktih

which means, *satsang* leads to detachment, detachment leads to renunciation, renunciation leads to equanimity and equanimity leads to death-

while-living. To Kabir, keeping the company of saints is like visiting a perfumer's shop. You will not only enjoy the perfume but will also collect a part of it with your being.

In love and surrender there is great trust in God and where there is trust, nothing can fail there. In our childhood we heard an interesting story of a child's faith in God's mercy: Once a village was caught in the grip of worst drought and people looked up at the bland sky helplessly. The elders suggested that they should propitiate the Rain-God by arranging a *yagna* and people agreed to it. Preparations for the grand ritual were made and on the appointed day, the entire village went in procession to the temple. In the procession there was a little boy who carried an umbrella with him. An elderly person who saw the boy asked him: "What for are you carrying the umbrella, there is not a flake of cloud in the sky?" The boy said: "Well, you are all going to pray God for rains; I do not want to get wet in the rain and so I am carrying this umbrella!" The fact is, although the villagers were going to pray God for rains, none of them had the trust or faith that God would answer their prayers. Only this little boy had that faith in prayer.

We read in the *Bhagavata Purana* that Gajendra, the elephant king, who was overpowered by the crocodile, prayed God for help-but with reservations in his mind whether there was the Supreme Being and whether He would come to his rescue. And when he could no longer fight and withdrew himself and left it to God, the Almighty did come to his rescue. That is why saints tell us that through

faith and devotion, and a self-effacing surrender, God can be approached sooner.

In the Sufi literature, there is an interesting dialogue between a master and his slave :

The master: What's your name?

The slave. Whatever name you give me, shall be my name.

The master: What do you want to eat?

The slave. Whatever food you give me, sir.

The master: What dress you wish to wear?

The slave: Whatever clothes you give.

The master: What work will you do?

The slave: Whatever you ask of me, my master.

The master: What do you want, after all?

The slave: A slave has no desires, my Lord.
The desires of the master are the desires of the slave.

Therefore, saints tell us that a seeker should offer himself totally, completely and unswervingly to the Sadguru; through *seva* and through pleasing the master acquire equanimity of mind, mastery over passions and endeavour to withdraw from the nine outlets and seek to open the Tenth Door situated at the eye-centre. That is concentration—which promotes meditation. If the master observes that his disciple is making an honest attempt to live within His command, He would give greater encouragement and strength to progress. The more one conditions his mind and shuns the snares of the world, the more does the Guru give him.

This does not mean that the Guru wants His disciple to withdraw from the world and settle in a forest hermitage or in a mountain cave. No. The Guru asks us not to run away from the world

because nothing can be really achieved by that. One may think that he has controlled his mind as long as he is away from temptations but the moment he is confronted by a different set of circumstances, he succumbs to his passions. Therefore, saints tell us that we must live the life of a householder performing all the prescribed duties, yet keeping our mind away from worldly trappings. The Sufis say : *Dil ba yar, Dast ba kar*-which means, mind set on the Beloved while the hands are busy performing worldly functions. Because, it is only in the householder's life that one is confronted by desire, pride, lust and anger; if he can emerge successful from that setting, he can be 'pure gold' fit for divine help

Saints tell us that spirituality cannot be a "Sunday affair". It must be an all-day and all-time worship. Living a life of *yamas* and *niyamas*, restraints and daily observances, one must control his body and mind and set his thoughts always on the Sadguru and allow the Master to take him to the Region of Eternal Peace, to the Abode of Eternal Bliss. The Buddhists say: *Nirvanam Shantam*; the Hindus say *Anando Brahma*. And the Sadguru says that He would take you to the Highest Realm where even the greatest of gods have not been able to reach and have still been offering *tapasya*

This is the greatest opportunity that has come our way and we should not fritter away our energies in vain discussion, in vain glories and in vain paths. The ancient path for self redemption is within us, within our own body. Only we have to seek the kindly guidance of a Perfect Master who is familiar with that Ancient Wisdom and who can take us

along that unchartered inner path with sympathy and mercy.

And to make Him grant us mercy, all we have to do is to live within His command and that command is that we should control our mind and start loving the creation of the Creator. That gives us the strength to realise the most noble ideal of man growing into Super Man, man dying daily long before his physical death which makes him fearless of death.

UPANISHADIC MYSTICISM

Asatoma Sadgamaya

Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya

Mrityorma Amritamgamaya

THIS prayer is from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. It means, lead me from the unreal to the Real; lead me from darkness to Light; lead me from death to Immortality. It is the *jivatama's*-, the individual soul's, craving to know and to realise the Supreme Soul, the *Paramatma*. For ages we have been living in ignorance. Ignorance is *avidya*, lack of knowledge. We think that comprehension of *neeti*, the principle, is knowledge. *Neeti* is transient and relative. That which is changing and relative is not truth, therefore, is not knowledge.

What we crave for is to attain *vidya-Brahmavidya*, knowledge of the Supreme Soul. But we have been living in darkness for ages. We do not know that we have been enveloped by darkness. Unless we try to comprehend what is knowledge, we cannot realise that we are plunged in darkness. Then comes the craving for light-that is the prayer *Tamasoma jyotirgamaya*. When we realise that the world is a passing phase and a transitory state and implore the Lord to lead us away from the unreal to the real and, when we realise that we have been blissfully living in the dark and pray to the Almighty that He may lead us from darkness to Light, then

comes the realisation, also, that what we see around us—including our beautiful body—is all destructible. Then we kneel down in prayer that He may take us away from death to Immortality. The three aspects of the prayer are in excellent sequence because it is only with the knowledge of the *Paramatma* that our being receives the illumination which leads us to Immortality.

However, there is the basic and most important point—awareness. How do we become aware of our plight? Only through the kindness of a Sadguru we become aware of our pitiable plight; again, only the guidance of a Perfect Master can show us the way of escape from this plight and lead us up the spiritual path. Saints do not come into our midst to indicate any new method or suggest any new path but to remind us of the glorious ancient path of *Anahad Shabda*, the unstruck melody.

The Upanishadic sages who prayed and worshipped the Supreme Being through *dhyana* (meditation) also told us of the glory of the Path, the glory of the Guru and the glory of merging with the Ultimate which they described as *ananda*, bliss.

The sages called the Master Guide the *Gu-Ru*. *Gu* is darkness and *Ru* is light. That is 'light in darkness'. That means He who leads one from darkness to light; from *asat*, the impermanent, to *sat*, the eternal; from ignorance to wisdom and; from death to immortality. That also means, He who releases us from the unending cycle of births and deaths which Sankaracharya described as *punarapi jananam, punarapi maranam*.

The question may be asked why at all a Sadguru comes? We are God's children. As the Father who

watches with pain and dismay the way we got entangled ourselves in the affairs of the world thinking that this is our permanent home, He decides to intervene; as the Father He wants His children to be away from the chaos and trappings of the transitory world and come back to Him. The *Gita* says that He comes here giving Himself a body for the purpose of delivering us from the snares. Therefore, He who has a mission of mercy is verily God. That is why in ancient spiritual thought Guru is equated with God. *Guru is Brahma*, *Guru is Vishnu* and *Guru is Maheshwara*. He represents the Trinity. Verily, He is *Parabrahma*, the Supreme Lord, the Eternal Vital Force. The *Kathopanishad*, therefore, says that in order to attain self-knowledge one must be taught by a *jnanī*, a *Sadguru*.

Guru-as the ancients tell us-is God. That means God comes down to the earth to live amidst us as a human being so that we are able to listen to him, befriend him, love him and worship him. One western saint has said: 'God longs as urgently for you to go out of yourself to reach him as though all His felicity depended on it.' That means, the love of God for us is so intense, his keenness to help us is so great that as if his honour, his dignity, his stature depended on his giving us his help !

Similarly, one Indian saint has said: 'Indeed, it is only the *bhaktas*, the devotees, who have made God great and famous!' Another great devotee has said: 'You are called the *patita-pavana*. Now, if we are not *patitas* (sinners)-how could you earn that honorific appendage? Therefore, it is your duty to lift us from the abysmal depth we are in.' We know that love knows no distinctions. The lover

never misunderstands the beloved, nor does the Beloved ever take the lover amiss. We have read in the *Bhagavata* that Satyabhama kicks Krishna on his head! God is compassionate. He comes to live with us with one purpose—to lead us back to Him. That is why one saint has said: ‘Let me dare to be divine since God has desired to be human.’

The Guru who chooses us* and gives us the great boon of *nama* and assures us that there is always room at the top because we were once there with Him, in Him. Our place has been vacant ever since we were sent into this world. That is why the Sadguru makes us realise that He became man for our sake.

Here, we cannot act otherwise because He does not want us to go astray. Everything is done by us at His will. And he wills that we take the path shown by Him. And what is that path? Love and Devotion. Through love and devotion we lift ourselves up to His expectations. Through meditation we realise Him, we attain to Him. Through the grace of the Guru we become infinite like Him. It is like this: A wick in contact with the flame itself becomes a flame and a source of light to other unlit wicks. No distinction exists between the light and the lighted wick. We would then be able to make that unique statement: *Tvamevaham*, Thou art me; *Aham Brahmasmi*, I am the Brahman.

That is the state described by the Upanishadic

* The *Kathopanishad* (iii) says : He is to be gained only by the one whom He chooses. To such a one the Supreme reveals Himself

sages as *amritatva*-immortality, deathlessness-which sums up all the three aspects of the prayer, *Asatoma sadgamaya*. This is a state in which the pilgrim himself becomes the destination. As Sadgurus tell us that such unitive experience is possible during this very life. If that is not so, spiritual experience will be a kind of fatal disease. But Masters tell us, rightly, that it is not so and the object of mystic pursuit is to attain *jeeteji murna*--in other words, *jeevanmukti*. As Jesus Christ said 'death-while-living'.

Now, this is a kind of death, saints tell us, we need not fear. Saints do not fear death; only life is fearful to them. The essence of saints' message is this. Freedom from death is really freedom from the fear of death. And freedom from grief simply means deadening of its severe pangs by taking the mind away from its blighting grip.

The upanishads say that only a Sadguru can initiate us into the mystic path of spiritual experience. The spiritual experience is not an abstract concept-it is a real, experimental science. At the spiritual university, students are taught by living Perfect Masters the science of self-realisation, the ancient discipline of *shabda-yoga*, also called *nada-yoga*. It is not imparting of theoretical knowledge of the *Para Brahman*. As the *Kathopanishad* says : "A wise man should draw his speech into his mind, his mind into his understanding, his understanding into the great soul and the great soul into the silent self."

The entire curriculum is based on individual effort. Every student has to work hard and realise the Truth. Because, there is no use in acquiring

scholastic knowledge of the self; one must realise the self to be able to comprehend the Truth. The *Brihadaranyaka upanishad* gives an interesting analogy: A man may learn from a chart the way to his destination, but none has ever reached the destination by merely mastering the route chart. Therefore, one has to start on the journey, with a Perfect Master as the kindly and constant guide.

And for this spiritual journey one need not renounce the world. Saints tell us that what is required is a spirit of renunciation. We must attend to our worldly duties and at the same time keep our thoughts entirely on the Sadguru. The guiding principle should be that the mind and heart be set on the Beloved, while hands are busy performing the functions of the world to earn an honest living. We have a story in the ancient texts of India: Veda Vyasa suggests to his son Shuka Dev that he be initiated by king Janaka. Now, Shuka Dev has his own ideas of a *Brahma-jnani*. He doubts whether a temporal ruler, who is always busy performing the duties of the State, would make an ideal spiritual guide. But the all-knowing Veda Vyasa insists his son should accept king Janaka as his Guru. Shuka Dev goes to Janaka's court and tells the king the purpose of his visit. He asks Janaka the question that has been vexing his mind : 'People call you a *rajarshi*, the saint-king. How do you earn that appendage?' Upon this, the king smiles and says: 'That is only the love and affection people have for me.' The student then asks for initiation.

The king knows that the doubt is still lurking in the student's mind. After a few days, a grand

festival is arranged in which a lamp-plate with oil filled to the brim is to be carried by a seeker, on his head. And for that Shuka Dev is chosen. He does the job admirably. The next day, king Janaka asks him several questions regarding the items of entertainment presented at every street-corner on the procession route. To all, the only reply Shuka Dev gives is: 'I do not know, really. I have not noticed any. All the while my mind was set on the oil-filled plate on my head. My worry was that, in spite of the unbearable heat of the lamp, not a drop of oil should spill over.' And that is that. The king smiles. Shuka Dev understands the meaning of that mysterious smile. King Janaka presides over the administration of his country and performs all the duties with diligence and responsibility. But his mind and heart are elsewhere. They are set on the lotus-feet of his Sadguru, Ashtavakra. He is at once a king and a saint, a *raja* and a *rishi*. That is why king Janaka is called a *rajarshi*.

How did he attain this spirit of renunciation? We are told that when king Janaka approached the sage Ashtavakra, the great saint demanded that the kingdom, the riches and all the wealth should be gifted away to him. Accordingly, king Janaka offered everything he had. Then the sage asked for the king's body, mind and soul. This was also done. The sage asked the king to step down the throne and himself sat on it and ordered that Janaka should sit at the other end of the durbar hall in the corner where people left their shoes. When Janaka went and sat near the shoes, his mind was sad that it was made to sit at such a place. The all-knowing sage sprang to his feet and said:

‘O, Janaka, do not forget that you offered your mind also to me. Now, you should not think with the mind.’ Upon this, Janaka closed his eyes, contemplated on the Radiant Form of his Guru and the next moment, he was one with his Master. Such is the great spirit of renunciation attained by king Janaka. Therefore, he was chosen by Veda Vyasa to be the teacher for his son, Shuka Dev.

A Sant Sadguru has to select us and lead us from darkness to Light, from unreal to the Real, from death to Immortality. But then, no farming is possible in an arid land. We must prepare the earth, water it well, manure it properly, keep out the weeds and then the seed sown by the Sadguru sprouts, grows into a plant and blossoms.

Therefore, the Upanishadic mystics gave us the call: “Arise, awake, obtain the best teacher and learn from him the essence of spirituality-deathlessness.” The nature of the essence is ‘without sound, without touch, without form, without decay and likewise without taste, without change, without smell, without beginning, without end, beyond the great and ever abiding’. The awareness of the essential nature of the Ultimate is freedom from the jaws of death.

However, the path to awareness of the essence of spirituality lies up the steep hill. The first important step is initiation by a Sadguru who is well established in mystic experience and always practises *Shabda Yoga*. The *Brahmavidya Upanishad*, a minor text though, mentions three kinds of preceptors: one who merely directs; one who instructs; and one who leads his disciples to final beauty. The first shows the path to the seeker; the second

instructs him to reach a particular spiritual region while the third imparts total practical training and leads him to the unique spiritual experience. Indeed many are the Upanishads which insist that a seeker must take the protective guidance of a teacher who is always in communion with God and that the Supreme Being can be comprehended only when initiated and instructed by such a preceptor. With such a spiritual guide as helmsman, the seeker can easily cross the *bhava sagara*, the ocean of worldly existence.

Again, a number of ancient texts emphasize that a seeker can accomplish his ideal only by the merciful favour of a Guru, and in no other way. And the mercy is given to the one who has the highest devotion for his Guru as for God. It is said that the knowledge of the Supreme blazes forth when the "jar of the body is shattered to pieces by the meaningful words of the Guru". The *Yogasikha Upanishad* which states this also reiterates that there is "absolutely no difference between Guru and God: they are in fact one." A person, therefore, should worship his spiritual teacher so that he may get spiritual knowledge as the fruit of his worship. Direct mystical experience is the result of spiritual knowledge.

Mystical experience of a seeker consists of perception of light and sound-light going ahead of sound in the spiritual journey. In the mystic light a seeker will be able to see a mountain of light in the middle of his brows when he sits in meditation. And many are such lamp-posts on the spiritual path. Then comes the experience of the mystic sound which is the very *Shabda Brahman*; and

absorption in that supreme sound is the ultimate that is attainable by a seeker. Even in this perception of mystic sound, there are stages and the final one heralds annihilation of the mind-which means absorption of the self into the Supreme Self.

By constant practice under the loving guidance of a Sadguru, a seeker will be able to sit in meditation and concentrate on the form of the Master and experience mystic 'death' daily. Thus, by dying daily he attains *jeevanmukti*, long before his death and conquers fear of death. The experience of a mystic when he comes back into his physical self has been described vividly in a number of texts. The one common thought is: I think of nothing but my own Thoughts; I am thought incarnate, yet beyond it; I am pure knowledge, and the highest joy, and peace incarnate.

Upanishads are a legion. Which book should one study and follow? Hanuman had that doubt and once asked Rama. The *Muktikopanishad* mentions an interesting dialogue in which Hanuman sought guidance from his Guru. Rama told him that there were four Vedas with a number of sections in each and each of these sections had an *Upanishad*. Rama added that the study of one Upanishad especially, the *Mandukya Upanishad* was quite sufficient to lead one to the path of spirituality. And the *Mandukya* is full of deep insight and profound understanding of the divine sound, *Om* or *Pranava* or *Shabda*. The essence of Upanishadic mysticism-why, all mystic idealism-is to perceive that divine sound current which reverberates always within one's body and get absorbed in it. That marks the fulfilment of mystic pursuit; that marks the realisa-

tion that he and God are one.

That might appear extravagant and incredible, if not blasphemous. All that the Upanishadic mystics meant was that "the inmost self of man, when all the limitations of body, mind and intellect were removed, was the same as the self of the universe. When considered objectively, the ultimate Reality was called the Supreme Being, and when considered subjectively was called Atman (self)." When the barrier between the self and the Absolute Spirit is removed, it becomes true spiritual experience. The self becomes *Brahman*. "I and my Father are one" is Jesus' way of expressing the same profound truth.

The Upanishadic mysticism is truly universal mysticism. The entire mystic experience of man is summed up pithily in the Upanishads. All variations of expression are verbal-the Supreme Being is one beyond all religions, creeds and languages. *Ekam Sat, Vipra bahuda vadanti*, the Truth is one, men of wisdom describe it variously.

THE RELIGION OF MAN

SAINTS tell us that all religions teach the same truth, therefore, all saints bring the same message. But we have a single-track mind. We cannot see what is real. To understand the universality of truth, to comprehend the essential unity of all religions, we must first look into the origins of religions.

Belief in a supernatural power which governs the universe; a system of practical piety, of faith and worship; human recognition of personal God entitled to obedience—these ideas may broadly indicate the meaning of religion.

There are different stories about the origin of man in this universe. According to Christianity, God created the universe according to his image, while he was alone; 'set every man in his place and supplieth them necessities'. Confucianism of China says that long, long ago before the world was created there was nothing. Then something appeared. Out of something *P'an ku* was created. He was very big and very strong and when he died, his last groan became the thunder, his last breath became the wind, his left eye became the sun and his right the moon. The blood of his veins became the rivers, his hair the forests. His flesh became the earth, the humans.

Now, the ancient man had some primary wants to live and to cause to live, to eat and to beget

children. And as long as nature and human events followed their normal and smooth course, no particular reactions occurred. But the ancient man was made aware that besides his fellow-men, friends, and animals which he pursued, or which pursued him, besides the things he was familiar with, there were around him other things that were outside his understanding-as they were beyond his foresight or control. He began to realise that if he was successful in fighting, it "had not been his natural strength of arm, quickening of eye or readiness of resource that brought him success". Man began to realise that if his cattle multiplied and his gardens were productive, it was not because he was industrious but because of something supernatural, superpowerful. This feeling came to him because given the same inputs, industry and effort, the yield was not uniform. Sometimes, rains failed him, other times the sun. Still other times pests destroyed his crops. He reflected on these and came to the conclusion that unless he appeased the elemental forces, his effort would not bear fruit.

There was the other-what we call-the human factor. In his pursuit and acquisition of the material things man experienced happiness, friendship, love etc. But when things went wrong, he experienced sorrow which caused hatred or anger or fear. These two-the need for appeasing the invisible force and control of man's social behaviour-aroused the sensation of the divine in human minds. When God created man, He gave him intellect also.

According to ancient Indian thinking, 'mysterious is the origin of beings, manifest is their

midmost state and mysterious again is their end.' God and His creation are significantly compared to a spider and its web. As a spider produces its web from its own body, so does God project Himself into His creation. The *Taittiriyaopanishad** traces the spiritual evolution on the earth—from matter to life, from life to mind, from mind to intelligence and from intelligence to Perfect Bliss. Or, to put it more concretely, the evolution has proceeded from stones to plants, from plants to animals, from animals to men and from men to the Supreme Spirit.

When ancient man suffered a sense of frustration, or suffered from disease leading to death, there came about the realisation of a hopeless inability to meet critical and inexplicable situations, to interpret the meaning of natural wonders—and thus came magic. And “spells and charms, rituals and recitations were resorted to, to heal a patient or to injure a person, to arouse love or hatred, to bring rain or to secure good harvest.” But the magician or the spirit-medium was not dependable for sure results. Then dawned on man the thought of supremacy of a higher force, the Providence. Thus, ineffective magic led to the evolution of religion and the magician became the linear descendant of the priest. A reverent and worshipful attitude developed towards the Supreme Power. Close on this development, the theory of divine kingship was propounded. The divine king was believed to be the incarnation of the gods upon whose beneficence man depended for his well-being. In ancient Rome,

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Egypt, China, Japan and many other countries this concept had taken root.

But this was a far-from-ideal situation. This showed that 'divine' intervention was imperative. And whenever God takes a human form it is always in the accepted tradition of the society. Therefore, the godmen of those periods were all of royal lineage—Lord Rama was the king of Ayodhya, Lord Krishna was king of Dwaraka, Lord Buddha was a Shakya prince and Lord Mahavira was from the royal family of Vaisali.

And each of these men of God gave his message to the people depending on their geographical, historical, social and cultural conditions. The Vedic seers of ancient India preached truthful living and worship of elemental forces of rain, wind, fire and water because theirs was an agricultural community dependant on these life-giving forces. The Buddha and Mahavira Jaina based their teachings on *ahimsa*-compassion, because animal sacrifices and ritual practices were rampant in their time. Lord Rama showed to the world the ideal of truthful living while Lord Krishna enjoined upon people that 'work is worship' and that through devotion one can attain to the Highest Ideal. Prophet Mohammed based his teachings on social relationships because these were at a low ebb during his time. Similarly, saints like Kabir, Guru Nanak and Swamiji Maharaj asked people to turn their attention within their own body because during their time, people had been pursuing vain religious practices like pilgrimages, recitations etc. They all belong to the noble category of God-sent saints whose main purpose was to remind people of the

glorious ancient message.

Saints tell us repeatedly that they have not come here to establish any new religion. Nor have they come here to give us any new message. They only reiterate the ancient truth. When Buddha explained the truth to king Bimbisara, he said, 'You do not teach a new religion, but you teach great changes in the old religion.' Upon this the Buddha said, 'It is as you say.' As king Bimbisara said, the great changes in the Buddha's teachings were only the special emphasis he laid on non-violence because that was the most important aspect of religion people of that period needed to be reminded. Again, in the case of Mahavira it is said, 'He is a great speaker, He speaks the Truth, the ancient Truth.'

In the words of Jesus, he came 'not to destroy but to fulfil'. Jnanadeva and Tukaram, the Maharashtrian mystics, said that their mission was to show the 'coin' as old as the beginning of ages. It is a treasure buried there from ancient times. Owing to egotism, this old treasure remains unknown. The Sadgurus tell us that the object of the saints right from the beginning of religion, has been to remind people of the eternal message of God.

The Sadgurus tell us that all beside love is but words. And they impart this message at various levels to the common man, to the scholar, to the dialectician-because they (saints) do not leave anything to doubt-whether spiritual, philosophic or dialectic. They strive-out of compassion-to make people understand the significance of their teachings and translate them in action in their daily life. Sometimes they employ the dialogue form as in the

case of Upanishads and the many Buddhist texts. It is a dialogue between the teacher with the taught. Plato also used this form to convey his teachings. Sometimes, they clothe the teachings in the form of stories, *Puranas*, *Jataka* tales or parables. Sometimes they use letters to impart the divine message.

Jnanadeva wrote a long letter to yogi Changdeva in which he stated his message. There is an interesting story about this letter written in reply to a letter sent by Changdeva. When Changdeva sat down to write the letter, he was not sure how to address Jnanadeva. If he said 'chiranjeeva' because Jnanadeva was younger, it would be inappropriate because he was a great saint. If he addressed him as an elder, it would be wrong. Therefore, he decided not to address him in any way but write down the body of the letter right away. He had certain doubts to be cleared about a spiritual problem but hesitated to put them down in black and white. So, Changdeva sent a blank paper. When it was received at the other end, Nivrutti, the younger brother, first 'read' the blank letter and gave it to Jnanadeva who passed it on to his sister Muktabai. She read it and wondered that Changdeva had such silly doubts about life and life after death. Upon this Nivrutti said that Changdeva was a simple and unostentatious saint who could be blessed with *nama* and asked his brother to send a reply. Now, this reply by Jnanadeva to Changdeva was in the form of 65 poems in *Ori* metre, which became famous as *Jnanadeva Pasashti*, presenting the essence of his spiritual message.

Saints convey their message to us in simple,

easy-to-understand language because their purpose in writing down all about the Truth they had known was not to show off their scholarship or their literary artistry. But it is well-known that religious works everywhere are among the best literary compositions. Whatever the saints wrote, said or sang acquired such a unique universal dimension and rare literary beauty that no secular writer could ever equal the works either in content or in form. We know, *The Bible* is the greatest work in English language; the *Koran* is of unparalleled literary beauty in Arabic; the *Ramayana* is the gem of literary compositions in Sanskrit; the *Mahabharata* is regarded as the store-house of human wisdom. If we may mention more-Sankaracharya's *Soundaryalahari* and *Sivanandalahari*; *Dhammapada* of the Buddhists; *Kural* of Valluvar; Andal's *Tiruppavai*, and the list can be unending. Tulsidas' *Ram charit manas*. The object of all these and many more works of spiritual literature is to establish the reign of God on earth.

The poetry of Kabir, Guru Nanak, Swamiji Maharaj and other saints acquires rare literary beauty, although achievement of artistic merit was not their aim. It is said, *Nan rishih kurute kavyam*-he who is not a sage nor a saint cannot compose a *kavya*, a literary work. And it is understood that without the vision, the love and devotion to the ideal of greatest good of the greatest number, no literature of lasting value can be written. Saints voice their concern for the spiritual welfare of man and, therefore, are capable of producing literature of lasting value. Their basis is eternal love of God.

And what is the teaching of religion? Confucius was once asked by a disciple, 'Is there one word

that would cover the whole object of religion?' The Master replied. '*Fellow-feeling* is perhaps that word. Do not do unto others, what thou wouldst not, they should do unto you.' Jesus said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than this.' We know the last commandment of Jesus, 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples-if you have love for one another.'

The main teaching of Judaism is, 'Lovers of Jehovah, hate evil!' And Judaism gave to the people the famous Ten Commandments, which though ancient in content, were not known to the local people before. The Commandments are: 1. To have no other gods than Jehovah 2. To worship no idol or image of any kind 3. Not to take the name of Jehovah in vain 4. To rest every 7th day in the week and call that day Holy 5 To honour their fathers and mothers 6. Never to commit murder 7. Never to commit adultery 8. Not to steal 9. Not to swear falsely or give false testimony 10. And not to envy other people and covet what they have. As we can see all the noble objectives of religion are covered by these ten commandments. People are asked to have absolute faith in God, not to fritter away their devotion to lifeless idols but to love and pray a living person sent by God, to have respect and regard for elders, not to hurt or injure or kill any living being, not to take a thing which does not belong to them, not to feel jealous about other man's property but to feel contented with whatever they have.

Now, this is what is acquiring goodness in life.

The Buddha says: 'From good comes good and likewise evil begets evil-this is the True Law of life'. Taoism of China echoes Lao-tze's lofty principle. 'To those who are good to me I am good; and to those who are not good to me I am good. And thus all get to be good.' Therefore, we see that when society falls on evil ways, selfishness and hatred become the order of the day religion comes to remind people how good it would be to good. True religion is what saints preach-not rituals and ceremonies which creeds insist on.

The Zoroastrian prayer states: 'I praise aloud the thought well thought, the word well spoken, the deed well done.' And the Zoroastrians believe that the Wise Lord has six heavenly assistants-Good mind, Good order, Wisdom, Piety, Well-being and Immortality. Now, the teaching is, we should try to become a heavenly assistant. In other words, we should acquire the heavenly characteristics and become one with the Divine.

The *Ishavasyopamshad* says: 'All this, whatsoever moves in this moving world is pervaded by God. Through such renunciation you may enjoy. Do not covet; for whose, indeed, is wealth?' This means, that God has spread Himself in the entire universe-which is His own creation. Every creature, every thing here-animate and inanimate-belongs to Him. God who gives us the human birth, also gives us a house-full of so many things and comforts-for our use. We should not think that this house, these comforts, the kith and kin are our permanent assets. They are transitory; that which is transitory does not really exist. Therefore, we should acquire a sense of detachment, a feeling of renunci-

ation while enjoying the things given by God.

The Upanishadic saints tell us that everything in the universe abides in the Supreme Being, and realizing this we should cast off desires and thoughts of possessing what does not belong to us. In fact, all the saints have emphasized this point. Swamiji Maharaj echoed similar sentiments in his famous book *Sar Bachan*. He said that the instability and transitory state of the things in this world, as well as its short-lived pleasures and egoistic thoughts, must create a craving in our minds for everlasting and unalloyed happiness and undisturbed peace in a mansion which is not subject to change, decay or dissolution.

All the religions speak of the same truth. However, after the passing of the saints, some of their followers try to give their own interpretation and, in the process, wholly distort the teachings. Differences of opinion arise and lead to schisms in the religious order. We are familiar with the division of Hinduism into sects, sub-sects, and denominations on the basis of varying ideas. One sect views the others with intolerance and suspicion—even contempt. The differences between Vaishnavites and Shaivites, as we know, were stretched to the extreme. It is common knowledge that the foreheads of the former are painted in three white vertical lines while the latter apply holy ash also in three lines—but horizontally. A number of stories are related in South India about the mutual intolerance of the sects. There is, for instance, the story of a Vaishnavite who pulled down all the horizontal girders in the house and the Shaivite who, in retaliation, demolished every vertical beam in his

dwelling.

Following the death of the Buddha, there were two councils held to codify the Master's teachings and the Buddhist order was split into two and later into many. Now, there are numerous branches among the Theravadins and the Mahayanists. Jainism also divided itself mainly, into Svetambara and Digambara, by offering different views on the sacred scriptures, the *Agamas*. Like the Buddhists, the Jains too went against the basic teachings of the preceptor and in course of time built temples and put into them marble images of the saint.

After the death of Jesus, the disciples called their Master Jesus the Christ. Now, Christ is from the Greek word *Christos*, meaning the Hebrew Messiah or the Anointed One. The disciples called themselves Christians and addressed each other 'brother' and 'sister' but that fraternal feeling did not last long. They quarrelled among themselves and began hating each other, and non-Christians, forgetting the great message of love given by Jesus.

Similarly, when Mohammed was born, Arabia was full of idols, stargazers, soothsayers, and fakirs of every kind Mohammed planted firmly in the people's mind, the belief of one God, the religion of universal brotherhood. But later, there were differences-perhaps, as many as the 99 beads in their rosary representing as many of the most beautiful names of Allah. As Maulana Rumi says in his *Masnavi* : 'Since you are always thinking of leadership and superiority (that people should accept your interpretation of the teachings), whoever mortifies and checks you, is an inveterate enemy. When a person says anything opposed to your

feeling, great hatred arises in your heart against him.' And Rumi gives a beautiful analogy: Until copper becomes gold, it does not know that it was copper; until the heart becomes king, it does not know that it was pauper. Unless the fuel is fully consumed, the flame of passion does not cease to burn.

That is why Sadgurus tell us that all religions are one; all saints speak the same language. Saints appear on the earth just at the opportune moment and teach us the essence of spirituality that the Reality is one, it is permanent and eternal, our aim should be to realise this Eternal Truth. Swamiji Maharaj says that saints have no religious bias—they are free people who are not bound by the dogmas or superficial practices of religion: they are the embodiment of True Religion. They talk of the essence of human life, that is, worship of the Supreme Lord and through worship returning to our Original Abode.

Therefore, the religion of man is the teaching of saints. That is, the religion of man is *Sant Mat*. As we have seen, saints interpret the message according to the requirement of the particular age in which they are born. Swamiji Maharaj who addressed the Supreme God as *Radha Soami* has said that our individual souls *jeevatmas*—are part of the Universal Soul-*Paramatma*. Our soul has been separated from the Father and having been born in this world, has taken the 'mind' for a companion. Through mind our senses are spread in the world. We crave for worldly pleasures and we are always in the pursuit of comfort and happiness. Therefore, whatever deeds we do—good or bad—its result is to be

shared by the soul also. Even these good or bad actions cannot release us from the shackles of the world. Good deeds may give us birth in an affluent family, may give us fame and name in society. That means, we will have shackles of gold in place of iron cuffs; we will have been elevated from 'C' class to 'A' class in the prison.

After enjoying the fruits of good deeds, we return to the unending cycle of births and deaths. In the *Gita*,* Lord Krishna says: 'Having enjoyed the vast heavenly world, they (the people) come back to the world of mortals when their merit is exhausted. Thus, abiding by the injunctions of the three Vedas and desiring desires, they are subject to death and rebirth.' Or if we do evil deeds, we will take a low birth and suffer. Suffering is common in both the births because birth itself is a herald of sorrow and suffering. None has ever experienced true enjoyment in this life. However, Sadgurus tell us that human birth is a great benediction God has conferred on us. Because, it is only through human life, man can seek to end the cycle of existence and suffering. In fact, saints tell us that this human body is the temple God has made for Himself to reside in. But how can we find the God who lives within us? Saints tell us that in the reign of God, only love and devotion matter. Only through devotion to Him we can attain to Him.

God resides within us in the form of Sound. If we are able to hear that divine Sound, we can accomplish the object of human life. For that, the Sadguru blesses us with the Divine *nama* and then

we should concentrate our attention-by withdrawing our mind-at the eye-centre. Through meditation of the Master's Radiant Form, we can traverse through the ocean of spirituality. It is only the Perfect Living Master, who initiates us into the seemingly mysterious realm of sound, who can lead us along the uncharted Path.

Through the compassionate guidance of the Master we reach our Permanent Home, the Eternal Abode of the Almighty Lord and merge in Him. That state is described variously as *ananda*, *sehaj* or bliss. Nothing that we have here on this earth can give us enjoyment-far from giving bliss. That is why, saints tell us that that which is not permanent is not true and that which is not true cannot give us bliss. Therefore, saints tell us that our aim should be to attain that eternal and permanent bliss.

It is the Perfect Master who picks up souls for taking them back to their Source, their External House. That marks the end of soul's journey; that is the end of all religions; essence of all spiritual teaching. Therefore, saints tell us that we should act in a way which will lead us to the Ultimate which is a point of no-return. The disciples are asked to translate the teaching of the Sadguru in action and live a life of love, devotion and purity, so that He will be pleased lead them soon from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light and from death to deathlessness.

IGNORANCE AND ILLUSION

In *Japji Sahib*, the sacred book of the Sikhs, it is stated : "Those whose souls are lodged in God, are neither under the sway of *Maya* (illusion), nor subject to spiritual death." In *Asa-di-Vir*, another Sikh text, God-inspired men are defined thus :

True servants without desire,
Contemplating ever the Eternal
Never straying into evil, they serve
Righteousness through pure endeavour ;
Rejecting the lure of the world,
They partake little of the pleasures of the flesh.

The idea of the inseparable association of spiritual enlightenment with moral life resting on restraint of desire and, endeavour in the way of the service of man and Super Man has been as old as man. Whenever goodness declines and evil rises, saints manifest themselves in the world to remind men of the ancient Truth and create an awareness and an awakening towards journeying to Godhead. The main impediments and basic hurdles in the way of man to realising his essential self and, through it, realising the Eternal and Supreme Self are ignorance and illusion. Ignorance of the impermanence of the material world leads man into illusion-an illusion that everything he sees around him is real and permanent, everything he possesses or enjoys in this world is true and eternal. And it is this sense of illusion that keeps him bound

down to this-worldiness with all the concomitant features-desire, craving, pride, ego, passion, and prestige.

Give it any name you like-*Maya*, illusion; or Satan, cosmic delusion; or *Kal*, the negative force. It is a direct result of man's ignorance. Saints tell us that the world we live in is a product of ignorance or nescience. And unless man acquires true knowledge, self-evident spiritual awareness, he cannot get over this ignorance-and as long as ignorance rules the roost, illusion spreads out in a colourful and alluring net, entrapping us all. This creates a psychosis-man's sense organs leading him by his nose. Saints of old clarified this point beautifully : Before knowing a thing, it is not known. So, before there is the knowledge of a thing, there is the non-knowledge of it. This non-knowledge is not the absence of knowledge, but a total unawareness of knowledge. All this is owing to our senses which have spread out in the world. It is these senses which cause ignorance and illusion which, in turn, cause delusion. Saints tell us that we can conquer ignorance and remove illusion by keeping our senses in control, by practising love to all that is created by God, to all that is sustained by God. We think we are going to stay here permanently. Saints tell us that this is some kind of a caravansara, a *dharmashala*, a choultry.

If we choose the spiritual path of eternal joy, instead of the passing, fading pleasures of the senses, *Kal* is rendered ineffective. So, saints tell us it is up to us to endeavour to vanquish *Kal*. Whenever we are slothful and careless, we help *Kal* to pull us down towards him. Jesus Christ says in a

prayer : ‘ Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ Temptation belongs to the world of illusion and all men are subject to it. But to enable us to free ourselves, God sends Prefect Masters here. They are adepts in vanquishing *Maya*, illusion, and are on a special mission to teach us the way we can subdue our sense desires and thereby remove illusion and conquer *Kal*.

The main object of religion is not to get man into heaven but to get heaven into man. However, saints tell us the heaven man seeks to get is, after all, within his own self. But they tell us that there is one impediment-and that is, man’s ignorance-and the illusion that is born out of ignorance. The individual self-*jeevatma*-had been part of the Universal Self-*Paramatma*-aeons ago. But owing to the will of the Lord Himself, we got separated from the Heavenly Source and born into this world, the sphere of *karma*. And according to our *karmas*, our actions, we have been taking a number of births among the 84 lakh species in the creation. But the Lord is so loving and merciful; He pines for us; He desires that we go back to Him and take our place by His side. Therefore, He gives us a human birth, as through human birth alone man can understand his pitiable plight and endeavour to get back to the Lord.

When we came into this world in human form, we came with the mind too. And mind with its so-called thinking faculty finds new and newer ways in which our senses could be utilised for material enjoyment. Thus, instead of trying to settle our *karmic* accounts finally to seek release from all bonds, we get increasingly entangled in the

pleasures of this world. This is because of our ignorance of the purpose of human birth, and the illusion caused by it blinds our normal faculties into thinking that we are born here only to enjoy these comforts and luxuries. We suffer from the illusion that everything we can command permanently belongs to us and that we will be here for eternity enjoying these material comforts. Godmen who come into our midst act as eye-openers. They know the world is transient and nothing that belongs to this world can be claimed as our own because we can carry nothing from here at the time of death.

That is why the Upanishadic seers of India had stated categorically that we must enjoy the God-given comforts with a sense of detachment as if we are mere tenants. But we suffer from a pathological feeling of possessiveness. Where there is a feeling of possession, there is misery at the cessation of possession. If we love a thing we have, we feel sad when it disappears. We suffer from an illusion that wealth is real, things we use are permanent, people we love are eternal. In the Upanishads it is said that the face of the Truth is concealed with a vessel of gold. In other words, Truth, Beauty and Goodness are covered and clouded by glamour and glitter. Unless the superficial allurements are removed man cannot see the beautiful Truth that is spiritually good for him.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna emphasises that the individual souls are part of the Universal Soul. The realisation cannot come about unless men feel that they are raw gold and the Lord is Pure Gold. Raw gold can be converted into pure

gold only through intensive heating and burning of the metal. We know that gold is an alloy; pure gold is pure metal, lustrous and shining. Saints tell us that our essential nature is like the Pure Bright Metal and that its brilliance is obscured because of layers of impurities mixed in the metals. And once man is able to weed out the impure elements, the lustre of Pure Gold will become clearly visible. The Sadguru gives us a beautiful analogy : If a dark sheet of cloth is wrapped on a thousand watt lamp, not a ray of light can be seen. Owing to the dark layers covering it, one is not aware of the brilliance of the lamp. But, if one begins to uncover the cloth, slowly the darkness will be shed and the light will show up. With the final and last wrapper removed, the magnificent light will be before us in all its brilliance. Only those who try to remove the layers of cloth can see the light. Others see dingy darkness all around them. Therefore, saints tell us that unless we begin to unravel the Truth about our real self, nothing will be clear to us. But it is the mind which stands in the way of our attempt to uncover the lustrous Truth.

Psychologists who tried to analyse the concept of mind from a purely academic standpoint, thought that the word 'mind' is a convenient term for 'the basis of consciousness'. When Descartes declared : "We are conscious; hence we must infer that our consciousnesses are real existents", some others belonging to the same discipline began to take cognizance that, after all, consciousness may in the end prove an illusion. And clarified that mind is a 'conscious illusion'. Here is where logic proves

futile and wisdom gains its rightful place. Here is where learned scholars find their depth and necessarily depend on the experience of saintly souls for a correct and authentic description of the qualities of mind—its sprawling, spreading nature, its vulnerability to vain material glories, comforts and pleasures.

Desire is the chief characteristic of the mind. According to Upanishads, breath and desire are the two seeds of the tree of mind. The decay of one leads to the destruction of the other too. The sages have categorically stated that the decay of desire leads one to self-realisation. And desire consists of sight and hearing. The craving to see our so-called near and dear ones; the comforts, the sense pleasures, egoistic prides and all, flow from keeping open the 'nine doors' of the body. Saints ask us to seal off the apertures once and for all. Then, there would be nothing and none that we would like to see or hear. And there would dawn the wisdom that all we had craved to see and possess, to smell and hear was stupid and futile.

With the nine doors closed thus the Tenth Door, will automatically open. It will be something like a flame burning bright, straight and unwavering in a breezeless situation. That marks the end of ignorance and uncovering of illusion. And a man free from ignorance and illusion becomes ripe and mature to taking the final step—crossing the phenomenon of death into the sphere of immortality. And just as milk mixes with milk, and water with water, merging their identity, the soul of man enters the Eternal Soul of the Super Man.

This is the Truth; this is the essence of spirituality; this is the message saints give us; this is the kindest word Perfect Masters bring to cheer us up. However, it is a million-dollar question whether we receive that message, whether we are prepared to accept that grace, whether we are ready to realise the Truth. In one of our sane moments, we may persuade ourselves to attend the discourses of a great Master, we may listen to his nectarine words but that is all. Mind is such a mountainous hurdle; our ignorance and our illusion are such great impediments that we do not-or, we cannot-try to translate their teachings in practice. Our ego, our dignity, our sense of pride prove great hurdles.

We have heard the story of Saint Ravidas and Raja Pipa, the king of the land. The king who had heard of the spiritual power of Ravidas, the cobbler-saint, decided to approach him for initiation. One evening surreptitiously he set out to the saint's hut. Ravidas was glad to receive the king; the spiritual ruler was pleased with the determination of the temporal ruler. He poured water from his vessel in the palm of the king to drink. Now, the king who suddenly became aware of himself and his royalty, felt a peculiar inhibition about gulping the water from the cobbler's vessel in which hide and leather had been washed. So, in the dark, he allowed the water to drop down from his palm instead of sipping it. When it was over, Raja Pipa got up and went away.

When the ruler reached his palace, he noticed that the water had dropped on his royal robes and soiled them. The next morning, he sent for the

washerman and ordered that the stains be removed. The washerman tried his best to remove the stains but could not succeed. He was in great sorrow. He was sure that the king would punish him for not washing off the stains. His young daughter who saw him in distress offered to try to remove the stains. She collected the robes and sat in a corner and began to chew up the stained spots and succeeded in erasing them completely. And from that moment, the young girl began talking about soul, Sadguru and the Lord Almighty. People in the area rushed to see her lustrous countenance and to hear her 'discourse'. Word reached the king who on inquiry learnt the facts. Ashamed of his ego and pride, Raja Pipa rushed to Saint Ravidas for pardon. He begged of the saint to repeat his merciful gesture upon which Ravidas said . "O king, I can only initiate you now and give you the *nama*. You have now to traverse the hardway to get the spiritual treasure. That grace is given only once and it was given!"

That is why saints tell us that it is the free mind that is responsible for our downfall. Because, it is through an expansive mind, man gets increasingly entangled in desires, in ego, in pride and in so many other evil features. And hence they teach us that we should subdue our mind. In a *Rig Vedic Sukta* which gives us the earliest source of the doctrine of the illusion of the world, it is said : "Desire in the beginning came upon that. That was the first seed of mind. Sages seeking in their hearts with wisdom found out the bond of the existent in the non-existent" In the Upanishads-particularly, the *Brihadaranyaka*-it is said : '*Atman* or universal

self is real; anything beside it or independent of it is unreal and is the cause of misery.'

Sages and thinkers who were born in the world at different periods also reiterated that the world is unreal. The Buddha compared the world to a bubble which may burst any moment; to a passing cloud on the firmament.* He described the world as *anitya*, impermanent. The Greek savant Plato believed the world is a mere show of puppets; the famous German philosopher Kant declared that the whole universe, as we know it, is only an appearance and not reality.

Saints, philosophers and thinkers of every clime and time have been telling us that the world we live in is but a passing phenomenon. Yet, man has not realised the Truth of their teaching. It looks as though he wants to take everything with him after death. Saints tell us the futility of such a thought. None has ever taken anything with him and none can take anything. Maharaj Sawan Singh says that if man could take his wealth with him, our great grandfathers and grandfathers would have collected everything they had earned, all riches they had amassed, with them leaving nothing to us. He further says : 'We very often refer to *my mind*. What is our own about it that one could claim? If it is our own mind, it should listen to what we say and never go astray.'

There is a story . Once, the king of Bukhara approached Kabir for initiation. Kabir asked the

*Taraka timiramdipo maya vasyaya budbudam svapnam ca vidyudabhram caivam drashtavyam asamskritam—Vajracchedika Sutra

king to stay with him for some time-only to know whether the disciple is ready to receive the mercy. Weeks and months passed. One day Kabir's wife asked the saint that it was perhaps time that the king could be accepted as a disciple and initiation be granted. Upon that Kabir suggested to his wife that it might be tested whether the king had conquered his ego. The next day, Loi, Kabir's wife, collected all the sweeping of the household and, when the king was coming out, emptied the basketful of dust and dirt on him. He looked up in anger and muttered to himself, "If it had been in Bukhara, I would have seen to it...." Loi reported this to Kabir. That means, it is extremely difficult to subdue one's ego and pride which are the direct result of the evil ways of mind. Saints tell us that unless we surrender our mind to the Sadguru, we will not be able to overcome its machinations. The king had to fight the mind endlessly for long years before he could curb his pride and ego. One day Loi threw garbage on the king and he said : "Blessed be those who throw dust on this wretched person; it is only thus, the mind can be controlled." Kabir was glad to hear this change of attitude in the king and initiated him.

But saints tell us that even if we endeavour to curb our mind for long years, we cannot say whether we will succeed at all. The only way left to us is to offer our mind to the Sadguru who will purge it of all evils-the evils of pride, ego, desires and passions-born out of ignorance of reality and illusion caused by it.

We hear of the story of king Janaka who gifted

away his mind to his great Guru Asthavakra. The cultivation of a sense of detachment of worldly riches and physical relationships, is the first that saints expect from their disciples. An earnest devotee as he was king Janaka gifted away his kingdom, his riches, his everything to his Guru. And finally, his Guru asked for the gift of mind. The king offered his mind too. Upon that, the sage asked Janaka to vacate the throne, went up and occupied the royal throne himself and ordered Janaka to go and sit on the floor at the entrance to the durbar hall where people left their footwear. As ordered Janaka reached that place and sat down. But he was feeling miserable and insulted. His ego was hurt that he was made to sit near the shoes of his subjects. Realising this, the sage shouted : "Janaka, remember, you have gifted away your mind to me and you cannot think with your mind any more! Your mind is my property now!" Then Janaka begged his Guru's pardon and prostrated at his feet. The *Deeksha* was then given. As the vessel was ready, it was filled with the grace of the Guru and Janaka could immediately traverse the inner spiritual path in the kindly company of the Sadguru. Later, the Guru said, "O king, I have no use for your kingdom and riches, keep them and rule your country for the welfare of your people, in the name of God" and returned all the gifts to the king. Now, this shows that once we gift away our mind to the Sadguru, it becomes easy for us to overcome all the passions, and leave ourselves to the care of the Master. Thus we can conquer our mind and dispel the darkness of our ignorance and remove the dark curtain of illusion.

Once we are able to do this, we begin to perceive light and by constant practice of humility, love and devotion we can see the brilliance of light and, slowly but surely, merge in that Light.

Saints tell us that God is Light; God is Love. And to all men Sadguru is God who is all light and all love. In order to conquer ignorance and illusion, as we have seen, we have to surrender our mind, our whole being to the Sadguru and submit ourselves to His will and care. The Sadguru is ever so kind, and compassionate that He always does the greatest good to us. Therefore, we need not bother about what He does with us as long as we are in His care. Some of the great devotees have said that the Sadguru's loving care and company is so safe, secure and comfortable that one would not really like to go away from it, even if it means merging with God, Almighty. There is greater contentment in enjoying the sweetness, rather than ourselves becoming sugar; there is greater bliss in enjoying the company of the Sadguru rather than merging in the Supreme.

It is said that *Abhyas* and *Anurag*-practice and love-are the chief points through which we can receive the Sadguru's compassion. Shri Ramakrishna preferred to remain a devotee rather than become God because, 'there is greater thrill, greater freedom and greater warmth in remaining a slave than in becoming a master.' The slave who seeks the protection of a master, can achieve anything, even the seemingly impossible. In *Mahabharata*, there is an interesting story. A meek and humble goat once sought the protection of a lion. The lion was so kind to the goat that he ordered all

the beasts of the forest, particularly, the elephant, to carry the goat also to the stream whenever they went to drink water. And, because of the protection of the lion, the goat could enjoy elephant ride regularly. Therefore, there is nothing that we cannot achieve by seeking refuge-*sharana*-of the Sadguru.

That means, by surrendering ourselves to the Perfect Master we can not only overcome ignorance and illusion, but also receive the blessing of staying in his presence and enjoying his company. So the basic requirement, saints tell us, to achieve this, is to start rightway by living within the command of the Master. (The thousand mile journey starts with the first step, after all.) He desires that we must sit in meditation regularly and cultivate not only purity of thought, purity of living and humility but also love and devotion for the Master which are, the two most important requisites for a devotee's spiritual progress.

WHAT IS DHARMA

*Yadayadahi dharmasya glanirbhavati Bharata
Abhyuthhanamadharmasya tadatmanam
srijamyaham*

This is what Lord Krishna says to Arjuna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra. This sloka from the *Gita** means : ‘Whenever there is a decline of *dharm*a and a rise of *adharma*, I incarnate Myself.’ In other words, he says · ‘When goodness grows weak, when evil increases, I make myself a body.’ Continuing, Lord Krishna says, ‘In every age I come back to deliver the holy, to destroy the sin of the sinner, to establish *dharm*a.

God descends into this world not because of any need on his part, but because of the need of mankind. It is man, cut off temporarily from awareness of his real Self, who needs to rediscover who he is. This ‘temporary cut-off’ is in a situation in which there is a decline of *dharm*a and a rise of *adharma*. Now what is meant by *dharm*a ? What constitutes *dharm*a? And what constitutes violation of *dharm*a which warrants divine intervention ? Saints tell us that the universe is the expression of *dharm*a. Does it mean ‘maintenance of the equilibrium’ is *dharm*a? To us, *dharm*a is a word of immensely complex meaning. It is a Sanskrit word and its root is *dh*r which means-to

uphold, sustain, or support. Naturally, to uphold some noble and lofty sentiment or ideal. Therefore, the word has a wide connotation. *Dharma* is something like *Forma* in Latin, which in English becomes *Form* which means that which supports, gives state or condition to the orderly arrangement of parts which makes a thing what it is. We have the English expression 'Good Form' which means conduct appropriate to any given occasion.

Therefore, *dharmā* may mean : Law, Norm, Duty, Truth, Reality, Gospel, Right, Teaching, Mental State, Elements of Existence, Virtue, Justice, Piety, Righteousness, Charity, Creed, Religion so on and so forth. The list of meanings may be limitless. But all denote only one thing : *Dharma* is that which saints and wise men teach us. *Dharma* is that which we should know, acquire, support and sustain.

In the *Gita*, the Lord says . God is the guardian *sashvata dharmā*, the eternal law, the religion of Man . They say, law and religion are inseparable-just as the object of all laws is order, the object of all religions is establishment of righteousness. Through the law, all religions thus become one . All have the same tenets of commandment and prohibition. All are simple and easy to understand . All aim at correcting man's social behaviour, thus putting him on the high road to spirituality .

Some people say that the word 'religion' comes from a word in an ancient language meaning 'tree' . And religions are, in many ways, like trees. They spread with so many flourishing branches sometimes, getting obscured beyond recognition. After the preceptor's death, his followers begin to quarrel

among themselves as to what their Master precisely meant by his teachings. It is well known that after the death of the Buddha, the monks tried to explain the teachings each in his own way. Whereas the Buddha preached against idols and idol worship, his followers built temples for him and began to worship the image of Buddha. And the Buddha became a part of the local pantheon in whichever country he has a following.

Similar is the case with Jainism. As time went by, the Jains began to worship stone images of Lord Mahavira. Again, when Guru Nanak had declared that there is no Hindu and no Muslim and that people must have a Guru, his followers in course of time, tried to undo the teachings of the Master. The entire set-up of Hindu religion to-day cuts at the very root of Vedantist principles. Now, this is a travesty of tenet. And in the present context we may say, a violation of the *dharma* by the followers of a faith.

The member of a society must act in a certain way supposed to be advantageous to his fellow individuals and himself, while certain other actions are forbidden. This is the law. In the Vedic language it was *rita* and in Persian, it is *arta*. Later, this came to be expressed as *dharma*, covering every aspect of human activity. This *rita*, the moral order, the law of custom and etiquette by which a man should act, has been inspired by God and evolved by godmen who desired that a society must live in peace, in concord, in harmony. This state of equilibrium is a prerequisite for the search for Truth. And, it is to guard this equilibrium and, thus, to create conditions conducive to acqui-

ring knowledge of Reality and Truth, that the Divine Spirit manifests itself in human form. That is why, in the Upanishads, we find statements like : 'There is nothing higher than *dharma*' and 'That which is *dharma* is the Truth'.

Dharma and Truth are said to be the practical and theoretical sides of one Reality. Essentially, man is a lover of order and, therefore, a searcher for truth. This aspect acknowledges man's eternal relation with the Divine Spirit symbolising Truth and Reality which are identified as *dharma*.

In the Buddhist thought, *dharma* is the king of kings. It is 'the absolute infallible righteousness of which our earthly justice is but a shadow'. For the Buddha, *dharma* is the driving principle of the universe which the people are expected to strive for and bring into their existence. In fact, the redemption of the world 'is the actualisation of *dharma*'. It is within man to attain it-and its sustenance is by the Divine Spirit. If it is not in our power to bring it into existence, there is no point in asking us to work for it.

Saints tell us that in order to express our love for the Creator, we must first love the creation. It is possible for us to love God's creation. We have just known that in an ancient language, religion means tree. We must learn to love the tree in order to love its fruit. We cannot make any distinction between one branch and the other or between one leaf and the other. In the *Book of Mirdad*, the saint asks : 'Is one to choose a certain leaf upon the tree of life and pour upon it all one's heart? What of the branch that bears the leaf? What of the stem that holds the branch? What of

the bark that shields the stem? What of the roots that feed the bark, the stem, the branches and the leaves? What of the soil embosoming the roots? What of the sun, sea and air that fertilise the soil? If one small leaf upon a tree be worthy of your love, how much more so the tree in its entirety? And he sounds a warning . 'The love that singles out a fraction of the whole foredooms itself to grief'.

To dwell in *dharma* is to dwell in *Brahman*. Insight into *dharma*, acquisition of *dharma* is knowledge, enlightenment *Dharma* is the unity of all ideal ends. By its inherent meaning and value, *dharma* controls human life. And the reality of *dharma* is vouched for by its undeniable power In the *Dhammapada* it is said . He who drinks in the *dharma* lives happily with a serene mind in this world as well as in the world beyond. And for righteous living the Buddha suggested the eight-fold path. The Eight Rules of Life are :

1. Right Belief : The belief that Truth is the guide of Man.
2. Right Resolve : To be calm all the time and never harming any living creature.
- 3 Right Speech Never to lie, never to slander any one, never to use harsh language.
- 4 Right Behaviour . Never to steal, never to kill and never to do anything that one may later regret.
5. Right Occupation . Never to choose an occupation that is bad, like

forgery, handling of stolen goods etc.

- 6 Right Effort : To strive always after that which is good and always to keep away from that which is evil.
7. Right Contemplation : To be calm and not allow one's thoughts to be mastered by either joy or sorrow.
8. Right Concentration : is then found when all the other rules have been followed and one has reached the stage of perfect peace.

Having explained the Eight Rules of Life, the Buddha pronounced the Five Commandments of Uprightness .

1. Do not kill
2. Do not steal
3. Do not lie
4. Do not commit adultery, and
5. Do not get intoxicated at any time.

By following these Eight Rules of Life together with the Five Commandments of Uprightness one will end all suffering and enter *dharma*. This is the eternal *dharma* and *dharma* is the door to deathlessness.

Again, in Buddhism, there are three sacred refuges or *saranas* :

Buddham saranam gachhami
Dhammam saranam gachhami
Sangham Saranam Gachhami

The first one is: I take refuge in the Buddha. That is, knowledge, or enlightenment is the only refuge for me. By destroying passions, by being indifferent to worldly pleasures, by subduing senses, one has to perceive knowledge. And knowledge-as against learning-is the only vehicle for reaching the Ultimate. Therefore, a disciple should seek refuge in the supreme, eternal, all-powerful and all-pervading Knowledge.

The second one is: I take refuge in *Dhamma*. The word 'Dhamma' is the Pali equivalent of the Sanskrit word *dharma*. *Dhamma* sums up truth, virtue, non-violence, restraint, and control. And he who acquires all these lofty principles and translates them in action and, he who is free from impurity, can be said to be living in *dharma*. It is the greatest spiritual ideal and rightly a disciple who has acquired knowledge-*buddhi*, should seek refuge in *dharma*.

The third one is: I take refuge in the *Sangha*, the society-the congregation of man who have acquired knowledge and through it *dharma*. In the parlance of Sant Mat, the *sangha* is the *sangat*, the assembly of *satsangis* who are the Guru-chosen people. By living constantly amidst seekers of Truth, we profit. By seeking the company of seekers, our thoughts are always set on *dharma*. Therefore, where there is knowledge, there is *dharma*, where there is *dharma*, there is *Brahma*.

The ancient Hindus stressed the significance of *dharma* in a number of texts: The ideals of *dharma* were first written in the form of *sutras*. The *smritis* came later. Goutama who was the oldest codifier gave rules of practical and ethical side of

life. These rules are meant for the householder. They are · Compassion, Forbearance, Freedom from anger, Purity, Gentleness, the Performance of Good Actions, Freedom from greed and Freedom from covetousness (avarice). It is enjoined that a man—

- 1 shall always speak the truth
2. shall instruct virtuous men
3. shall conduct himself as becomes an Aryan*
4. shall follow the rules of purification
5. shall take pleasure in knowledge
- 6 shall never hurt any living being
7. shall be gentle yet firm
8. shall ever restrain his senses and be liberal.

There is a story behind the author of the first *Dharma Sutra*, Goutama. And it is believed that with Goutama, *dharma* came into existence, in the remote past* :

“One day all the jewels of heaven were seated in the Sudharma, the heavenly assembly hall. The celestials were sad and thoughtful. They were worried about the oppression and lawlessness on earth. The continuous moaning of mortals troubled them. Mother Earth who could not bear this burden decided that she should act now. She left for the assembly of gods in Mount Meru. On the way, she met Narada who escorted her to heaven. There was peace and silence every where in heaven. Who would help them? Narada thought of Brahma, the creator. Mother Earth

* Aryan is an elder synonymous with wisdom

* *Women in the Sacred Laws*—Shakuntala Rao Shastri

narrated her sad tale to Brahma and requested his help. Brahma and the other devas directed them to approach Shiva, the supreme god. Brahma, Narada and Mother Earth reached the home of Shiva on the snowy peak of Mount Kailas. 'You look rather troubled; what can I do to help you?' said Shiva with great compassion. Brahma explained that Mother Earth was overburdened with sins of mortals and that lawlessness pervaded the earth. 'Unless law and religion are established among mortals Mother Earth will ever remain devoid of peace', Brahma added.

'So be it', said Shiva. 'On your way, you will find a rich but sinful man by name Padmavarna. Teach him law and he will spread the law on the earth.' Mother Earth went to her abode while Brahma and Narada floated together in the aerial sky. They neared a palace from which were heard screams of agony. Terror reigned in that region. That was the house of Padmavarna. Brahma and Narada assumed the form of rich merchants and approached him for hospitality. Padmavarna was happy to welcome them. He gave the noble guests good food and conducted them to their respective rooms for rest. All the while Padmavarna was watching the amount of wealth his guests carried. As the guests were about to relax, armed men rushed in with swords and spears. As they set out to charge the guests, they suddenly became lifeless and remained transfixed where they were. Padmavarna stepped in and rushed to seize the guests. Then Brahma said with a smile: My brother, we are pleased with your hospitality. What do you want of us? We shall be pleased to

give you all that you ask. But who are you?' 'I am the king of this region. I lure rich merchants and kill them and take their wealth.' 'We shall gladly give you all our wealth if you carry it with you to heaven after death.' 'Why, that is not impossible!' 'But, my dear Padmavarna, have you seen anyone taking his wealth with him?' Padmavarna began to reflect. The words of Brahma were working on his mind. Brahma said : 'My brother, we give you time. You may keep us here in strict guard and go to the cremation ground. Tell me if you see any one taking his wealth with him after death' Padmavarna asked his men to guard the guests and went to the cremation ground. He found every minute a dead body coming. The bodies were stripped of every thing and consigned to flames. Not one of them carried any wealth. No, even the body nourished so tenderly was destroyed.

Padmavarna returned, sad at heart in the evening. His mind was filled with dismay. He related to Brahma what he had seen. Brahma whose heart was filled with compassion, said : 'My brother, nothing of this earth can a man carry when he dies-even this very body is left behind, in ashes, as a load, not to speak of riches.' 'Is there nothing then, that will go with me after my death?' Padmavarna asked. 'Yes' said Narada. 'It is *dharma*, the eternal law, alone that accompanies the soul' and he recited a Vedic commandment which means : 'Friends turn back leaving behind the dead body like a piece of stone or wood.' *dharma* alone follows him. By the help of *dharma* alone one crosses the terrible darkness of death.

As the sombre words fell on the ears of Padma-

varna, he looked up and seeing their shining faces wondered if they were men or gods. 'Who are you?,' he asked, 'Mortals or Devas?' Brahma and Narada manifested their divine forms, instructed him in the ways of *dharma* and disappeared.

Years passed. Padmavarna gave up all his evil ways and performed penance. He meditated on *dharma* and realised its nobility and majesty. Then he declared the *dharma* to the world 'Law is the king of kings, for more powerful and firm than they; nothing can be mightier than law by whose aid, as by that of the highest monarch even the weak may prevail over the strong.' Padmavarna was the law-giver Goutama."

This is the *dharma*. That is why *dharma* is said to be truth. Whosoever lives in *dharma* lives in God. That is why ancient seekers of truth have laid down certain commandments and prohibitions for the realisation of *dharma*. And our texts are full of lofty stories of great souls who have given their every thing-including the body-for the preservation of *dharma*. In fact, the life of man is governed by a set of *dharma*s-we have the *Dharma Skandhas* or the three ashramas-*Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha* and *Vanaprastha*. Acquiring knowledge by sitting in the presence of the Preceptor, is *Brahmacharyashrama*-*Grihasthashrama* enjoins acquisition of knowledge through the *Purusharthas* (motives of man)-*dharma*, *ardha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Then *Vanaprasthashrama* which enjoins contemplation and meditation.

Now, we have read that our ancients acquired everything through meditation and penance. The Hindu Trinity-Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara-acquired their powers through meditation and

through the compassion of the Eternal Supreme Power.

Meditation and living in *dharma* give us oneness with the Supreme Lord. There is a story of Sufi saint, Ibrahim-al-Khauwas, who was seated beneath a tree when a lion approached him. His companion fled up the tree, but Ibrahim sat still in meditation. The lion sniffed him over, and departed quietly. The following night when the two friends were camping in an old mosque, a bug fell from the rafters on to Ibrahim's face. He cried out in fear. His companion exclaimed, 'Yesterday you were not troubled at the lion, but to-night you cry out at a bug. 'Yes', replied Ibrahim, 'That is true, but yesterday I was with Allah, the most high. To night I am only with myself.'

Since we talked of a Sufi saint, let us see what Sufism says about the Eternal Law. It is well-known that Sufism seeks to fill up the the gaps left by Mohammed in the satisfaction of the religious and spiritual needs of his followers. About a century after the time of the Prophet, ascetic movements-in the fashion of Hindu and Christian ascetism, developed in Islam. The communities were called Sufis, from the grey or white wool garments worn by them. 'Suf' means wool. Sufism treats all positive religions as useful for reaching the Ultimate Reality. The aim and object of Sufi commandments is union with God. These commandments or exercises are undertaken with the avowed object of forming character and especially of altering the sense of values held by the individual. The exercises are generally called the "Seven Valleys":

1. The valley of search, or renunciation of earthly possessions and setting out on the pilgrimage.

2. The valley of love, or kindling with ardour for God, the Beloved.

3. The valley of knowledge or illumination.

4. The valley of independence or detachment.

5 The valley of unity, or contemplation of the Divine Essence

6 The valley of amazement, or torment at failure to achieve union.

7. The valley of the annihilation of self This final and seventh stage is called *fana* or 'passing away'.

The whole concept of *dharma* stems from the impermanence of all that is created. The sense pleasures and enjoyment should be treated as our enemies. The material world is like a tiger trying to devour man. It is said by a famous writer. 'Onions can be eaten leaf by leaf, but a live tiger cannot be skinned paw by paw, for the tiger will do the skinning first.' Again, the material world is described as an abyss, a deep fathomless valley. One has to cross it with all power of *dharma* at one's command. It is said : 'You cannot leap over the abyss in two jumps.' If we think of having a hop, step and jump, we will reach the bottom.

Describing the nature of *dharma*, the Sadguru says . "Keeping oneself in *dharma* is like swordedge walk. Man must become human and acquire *dharma* which keeps the entire universe in a state of equilibrium. Various divisions of *dharma* are mentioned in own classical texts : forgiveness, non-violence, kindness, compassion, good speech.

meditation, charity, character, purity and freedom from desire. These are the main features which sustain humanity. The Sadguru reminds us that *dharma* has four feet : Truth, Purity, Compassion and Charity

There is another set of four feet of *dharma* according to Bhai Mani Singh : 1. *Nam* 2. *Dan* (charity, compassion, forgiveness) 3 *Shan* (purity) 4. *Jnan* (knowledge). And the great Sikh Guru Ram Dasji says : Through meditation, all the four feet of *dharma* set into the life of a disciple. He says that can be described as *dharma*, the knowledge and acquisition of which makes life meaningful and leads man to the Ultimate Reality, the duty which gives happiness to both the doer and asker is called *dharma*. If there is absence of happiness in any such deed, there must be something wrong in our understanding of *dharma*. The most important aspect of *dharma* is that we should conduct ourselves in a way which is ordained by the community. This brings in harmony and concord between peoples. The Sadguru teaches both *pravritti* and *nivritti* ways and persuades people to adopt *human* attitude so that they can be lead to the Perfect State. By this we know that the Master is restating the ancient truth which leads mankind to salvation. There is the beautiful story of a man going to Veda Vyasa to know, in simple terms, the meaning of *dharma*. He tells the sage that he is a little confused about the meaning because *dharma* means many things to many people and each gives his own meaning. Upon this, the great sage says : 'Whenever you begin to do a thing, just keep it in mind that you will do that, the way you expect

others to do for you.' This is the simplest practical meaning of *dharma*. This reminds one of what Jesus says : 'Do unto others what you expect others to do unto you ' This is the greatest *dharma* we have to support and sustain.

The *Mahabharata* says that the index of *dharma* is good actions. Through good action *dharma* prevails. Through *dharmanushthana*, observance of *dharma*, we acquire knowledge; through acquiring knowledge we fill our lives with light-the light that dispels all darkness. And darkness is what envelops us now in the form of passion, anger, lust and craving. By withdrawing ourselves from the snares of this world, by shunning the unreal aspects of life and by cultivating love and devotion to the Master who has chosen us, we can not only seek that beautiful light, but also can reach Him. The observance of *dharma* will lead us on the royal road to self-realisation which is the essence of spirituality

THE ESSENCE OF DHARMA

IN the pursuit of *dharma*, one has to take care that all the aspects of truthful living are strictly adhered to because it is the sum total of the different *angas* (limbs) which makes for *dharma* in its entirety. If we accept and translate in action nine aspects and ignore one, we cannot be said to be living in *dharma*. It is said in the *Kural*, the Tamil classic composed by Valluvar, that if there is a small whole in the sack, it is futile to attempt to fill it-because grain drops down continually. Similarly, if there is a small crack in a well-built roof, all the rain water will collect in the room. Again, in the fulfilment of the ideal of *dharma*, no particular aspect has any extra significance. Each aspect does its role like the various limbs in human body. None can assert any supremacy.

There is a story which we read in our school books : One day a man had a hearty meal and was relaxing. Then, the various limbs in his body assembled in a conference. Each one began to boast about its greatness. There were arguments and counter-arguments. Finally, all turned their anger on the belly, the stomach. The legs said : 'We make the body stand erect and take it to anywhere it has to go. If the belly has to attend a dinner, we have to take him there. He feasts on most delicious dishes. Now, enough with it. We are tired of taking him to every place. We

stop walking any more.'

Then the arms raised themselves and said : 'Whatever one wants to hold, we have to do it-for writing, for working and for eating. We lift the food and give it to the belly. Enough, enough. We are no more interested in serving the belly.'

The eyes raised their brows and said : 'Well, every one agrees that the eye is the most important part of the body. Without us, the body cannot see anything. It cannot see where the food is served and which dish is where. The belly sits cosily and enjoys the food. We do not want to do the job any more.' Then the nose had its say and then came the turn of the mouth.

The mouth said . 'I crush the food, pound it and make it a paste and give it to the belly. My jaws ache and my teeth ache. Enough with it.' Then all of them decided to strike work and abstain from their respective duties.

The belly smiled and did not say a word. Two days passed and the belly had no food. But it did not affect the belly so much. The legs, arms, eyes, nose and other limbs began feeling the impact. The legs and arms were getting benumbed, and weak. The eyes were blinding, the mouth got dried up. Then the belly addressed the limbs saying : 'You abstained from your duty out of sheer jealousy that I was sitting idle and enjoying whatever you put in. But, you forget that I turn the food you bring into blood and energy and pass them on to you. Each one does his duty and the total effect is generation of energy. So, do not think that any one of you is great and the other is inferior. It is the combined activity that sustains

us all.'

Similarly, it is the combined and total adherence to the various aspects of truth that yields *dharma*. Saints tell us that the most important thing in the pursuit of *dharma* is that one should not be aware of the whole thing. It should come as naturally and as effortlessly as the fall of dew drops on a morning flower. The Sadguru tells us that in love and devotion-which is our *dharma*, there is no scope for a feeling of self. Once there is the awareness of self, the whole thing is defeated. Because, he tells us, there can be no awareness in *bhakti*. Once a devotee asked Ramanujacharya : "Pray, my guru, when do I attain salvation?" The master answered cryptically "When that 'I' ness is killed." And similar are the ideal sentiments expressed by saints all the world over.

We come across some people who declare proudly that they are the chosen disciples of the Lord, that the Lord has special love for them. In *Bhagavata Purana* we read the story of Satyabhama, the consort of Lord Krishna. One day, the Lord decided to correct her impression and for that colluded with the sage Narada to advise her that in order to obtain the Lord all for herself eternally, she needed to perform a ceremony. Accordingly, Narada advised her and she went through the ritual. At the end of the ceremony, Lord Krishna was to be offered as a gift to Narada but could be bought back against gold equal the Lord's weight. Now, Lord Krishna was made to sit in a balance and Satyabhama brought all her gold and ornaments and placed them in the weighing balance. She was so sure of buying back her

Lord because, she had tons of gold with her. But all her gold could not weigh equal to the Lord. And it was part of the terms that if Narada was not offered gold equal to the weight of Krishna, Krishna would be sold to whoever could pay the price. Now, Satyabhama was shaken that all her wealth could not buy her the Lord. Then, Rukmini, the other and most devoted wife of Lord Krishna, came to the rescue. She prayed her Lord and placed just one leaf of the Tulasi (Basil) plant and that out-weighed Krishna. Satyabhama then learnt the lesson that pride of possession of the Lord was unbecoming and was the very negation of love and devotion. Pride is an impediment to *dharma*.

Similarly, saints tell us that we should cultivate and acquire quietude and calmness in life. If our mind is full of passion-passion of any kind, full of avarice, full of anger, we cannot view things in their proper perspective which means, a distorted view. If this happens in our worldly dealings we cannot have equanimity which is essential for the practice of *dharma*. In *Masnavi*, Maulana Rumi states : 'A certain person, in your eyes, is like a snake; the same person, in the eyes of some other, is a picture of beauty. Because in your mind there is the thought of infidelity, and in the mind of his friend there is the thought of belief.'

There is a story in the life of Samarth Ramdas, the sage of Maharashtra, who wrote Ramayana. After completing the work, the saint began to read it out to his disciples chapter after chapter daily. And Hanuman, the devoted disciple of Lord Rama, was also *attending* the readings. One day, the sequence was Hanuman's visit to Lanka in

search of Sita. When Samarth Ramdas read out that in the Ashoka grove of Lanka, Hanuman saw lily-white flowers everywhere, Hanuman who was listening to the recitation with rapt attention manifested himself and interrupted shouting, 'Now, Swamiji, you are not correct in saying that I had seen white flowers. What I saw everywhere in the Ashoka grove were bright red flowers'. But the sage-poet insisted he was right. Then they both agreed to seek clarification from Lord Rama, who is omnipresent and omniscient. When approached, Rama said : 'What Hanuman saw in the grove were pure white flowers. But since, his mind and the whole being was filled with anger and indignation, his eyes were covered with a veil of red. Therefore, every thing he beheld appeared to be red.' Saints say : 'What we are we behold and what we behold we are.'

Unless we purge our mind of emotions and passions, we cannot acquire equanimity; without equanimity concentration is not possible and if concentration is not possible we cannot sit in meditation-which is the most important *dharma* with all seekers of spirituality. If we shout at someone in anger, if we hurt someone in pride, if we cause pain to someone in avarice, it will disturb our peace of mind. We will not be able to concentrate and sit in meditation. Therefore, our aim should be : Purity of thought, purity of word and purity of action.

How to achieve this? Saints give us a simple example : When we find our little son, sitting outside, not studying his lessons with attention and concentration, we drive him inside and ask him to

do his lessons seriously. And it is a fact that, sitting outside, the boy is drawn towards the chirping birds and the little puppy playing around and the hawkers selling mouth-watering sweets and many other things. Once he is inside, there is no external impediment to his concentration. Therefore, he is able to study well and pass out with distinction. Similarly, we have to withdraw our attention, which is now spread all over, and concentrate at the eye-centre and meditate on the glorious form of our Sant Sadguru. And once we are able to control our passions and concentrate, nothing that happens outside will be known to us—in other words, we simply do not bother whatever happens before our eyes. We do not care or we will not be aware of the things around us. We should become children in this respect. A child can gaze at a thing without batting an eyelid for minutes on end whereas we bat our eyelids dozens of times in a minute. Vinoba Bhave in his discourses on the *Gita* mentions an interesting story of a Muslim saint to drive home the point that once we concentrate our attention and meditate on the holy form of the Lord, we will not be aware of what happens even to our body. The story is . . . Once the Muslim saint was hit by an arrow accidentally which caused extreme pain to him. When his disciples tried to pull it out, the pain became more intense. Therefore, it was not possible to draw the arrow out. Anaesthesia was not known to people in that distant time. An elder disciple then suggested that they should not try to pull the arrow now, but wait till the saint sat for his daily meditation. A little later, the

saint began to say his 'namaz' with extreme concentration. The disciple pulled the arrow out in a flash and the saint never knew or felt that. That was the effect of withdrawing senses.

Therefore, in our search for the eternal truth, concentration is a most important requisite. Concentration and dedication to duty give us all other qualities. Even a seventy year old man can muster the enthusiasm and energy of a twenty year old youth. And it is enjoined on us that we should seek to develop inner strength-spiritual energy-as we grow in age. Take the fruit, for instance. It is greenish when young but matures in course of time; later it ripens, and rots. But, the seed inside the fruit becomes mature, gaining in vigour and quality with the passage of time. The external form of the fruit rots and decays. But, the essence of the fruit is not the outer pulp or juice. The soul of the fruit is the seed. Similar is the case with human body. The physical body may grow old but its power of concentration, its ability to meditate must increase and grow.

This is possible only through adherence to *dharma*-following the sacred code-sincerity to God, severity to self, justice to all people, service to elders, kindness to young and generosity to the poor. This is the sacred law preached by Prophet Mohammed to his disciples. This is the universal law. What is good and ideal to the followers of Islam, is good to the believers of Hindu, Christian and Sikh *dharma*. The *Rig Veda* says : *Ekam sat, vipra badudha vadanti*-truth is one, teachers speak of it in various ways. A tank has many *ghats*. From one side the Hindus take water in pots and

call it *jal* ; Muslims take in leather pouches from another and call it *pam*; Christians take it from the third and say *water* . Similarly, what is enjoyed upon Christians, Sikhs and Hindus is worthy of emulation by Muslims too. The frills or ornamentation one finds in the pronouncement of *dharma* is only external, suiting to particular situations. The essence of spirituality is the same eternal truth, eternal *dharma*.

By sincerely following the various instructions of the saints, we can achieve what is seemingly impossible. If we purge our mind and soul of all impurities, we become eligible to see that effulgent light. The Sadguru says that we must vacate the body and keep it ready to receive the *nama*. Once this is done, saints are so compassionate that they grant us the greatest boon of meditation and perception of the Radiant Form of the Master. Here let us recall how Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa attained that state : An itinerant monk called Totapuri taught Shri Ramakrishna how to practise meditation. On the very first day, Shri Ramakrishna got into *samadhi* and remained in that state for three days. The monk wondered whether it was possible to attain this state in the course of a single day because it took him forty years of strenuous practice. Now, Shri Ramakrishna prepared himself and was ready and when he was shown the way, it was easy and simple for him to traverse the Path. Whereas the monk himself took long years in preparation. When the seeker is ready, He appears before him and leads him to where he originally belonged.

Saints tell us that we should have complete

faith and trust in God's mercy and kindness. People worship God and pray him for mercy but since their prayer is not sincere, they do not surrender themselves to His will and, therefore, cannot expect that God will be merciful towards them. We remember a story which we read in our childhood : Once there were no rains for a long time. Tanks and ponds dried up and there was no water anywhere. The drought crippled the people's normal activity. The village elders met and decided to arrange for special prayers to the deity for rains. On the appointed day, they took out a procession and carried a number of offerings. In the procession, there was a small boy who carried an umbrella with him. One elderly man who saw the boy said : 'There is not a flake of cloud in the sky; it is so clear. My boy, why do you carry an umbrella?' Upon this, the boy replied 'Well, you are all going to pray God to give rains. God will surely give rains-may be right now. And I do not wish to get drenched in the rain. That is why I am carrying an umbrella.' Perhaps, in the entire village which went to pray God for rains, there was none besides this boy, who trusted that God would certainly answer their prayers and send rains to quench the thirst of the people.

Explaining the essence of *dharma*, saints tell us that a man 'should be a cause of healing to every sick one; a comforter for every sorrowful one; a pleasant water for every thirst one; a giver of food for every hungry one; a guide for every seeker; rain for cultivation; a light for every lamp and a herald to every yearning one for the kingdom of God.' There are so many aspects in

this teaching which we doubt we will not be able to fulfil. For instance, 'be a guide for every seeker', 'be a light for every lamp' and 'be a herald to every yearning one for the kingdom of God'. These three commandments are meant for saints only. But, if we can translate in action all the other instructions, we acquire the qualification to be called a 'man'. And if a man lives a truthful life, a life of *dharma*, a life according to the commandments of the Perfect Master, He will be so pleased as to manifest himself in him. Man then becomes a saint.

Therefore, a man living up to the instructions of the Divine, becomes one with the Divine. In other words, man will be able to realise the truth that the Divinity he has been searching for, is not somewhere outside but very much within himself. Therefore, we should attend to our duty-whatever it is, and, as long as it is based on honesty and truthfulness, with sincerity and devotion. We should draw lessons in spirituality whatever duty we are engaged in.

There are many interesting stories of realised souls who accomplished the Ultimate through performance of their routine duties. There is for instance, the story of the butcher-*vyadha*-in the *Mahabharata*. He lived a truthful life and always prayed that God should wash and purify him as he himself washed and purified the meat he sold. The butcher had been initiated by a kindly Guru and, therefore, he could cultivate a sense of duty to his own occupation-doing everything with a feeling of detachment. Again, there is the story of a merchant who realised God through truthful and honest

weighing of the things he sold. As long as one is honest and truthful in whatever occupation he is engaged, he can attain to *dharma*, and realise the Ultimate

It is not sadism to say that the world we live in is impermanent and that we should cultivate a sense of detachment. On the contrary, the Sadguru says that we have to attend to our responsibilities as a house-holder; feed the wife and children and honour all social obligations. The philosophy of the saints only suggests that all that is truthful is your *dharma*. All the rest is transient—like the Buddha reiterates,—like the morning star, like the dark night, like the burnt wick of a lamp, like a dew-drop, like a soap-bubble, like a dream and like a lightning.

Saints, therefore, are never tired of driving home the point that we should acquire the *dharma* through which we can cultivate a sense of discrimination to reject the impermanent and accept the permanent, to reject the unreal and accept the real, to reject untruth and accept the truth. Our endeavour should be to see all that is true, good and beautiful. The ancient sages perceived it as *Satyam*, *Shivam*, *Sundaram*. In other words, that which manifests these three aspects, should be our goal. Saints tell us that once we try to acquire truth, goodness and beauty and begin to see these aspects in the entire creation, our mind will be free from all afflictions. Once the mind is rid of cancerous thoughts, it becomes healthy and pure. And a mind which is pure gives us the calmness and equanimity conducive to meditation.

The saints of India say that there are three path-

ways for God-realisation. *Karma yoga*, *Bhakti yoga* and *Jnana yoga* *Karma yoga* is the ethical path where man, by cultivation of the highest ideal of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and through performance of duty achieves selflessness to such a degree as to be able to renounce the entangling activities and understand the true nature of realisation.

Bhakti yoga requires that man should not only act selflessly, but surrender himself completely to the Lord. Here, even the slightest egoism would be a hindering factor.

Then, the *Jnana yoga*, the path of knowledge. One devotes himself to true knowledge and concentrates on realising such knowledge in life. To know that the dear and the near are the very causes of suffering, and to prepare to renounce them, is extremely difficult. Swamiji Maharaj says our relatives are 'sweet cheats'. Just as the true colour of a cheat is seen only at the end, the 'deceitful' nature of our near and dear, cannot be known earlier.

Although, we notice that each path includes the other two as pre-requisites, our Sadguru tells us that the *bhakti marga*, or the path of devotion, is the only path for us. The Master knows our weaknesses, He is aware of our entanglements in wordly activities. Therefore, He says, 'I come to you to give strength, to give you light and to give you that sense of detachment.' But the pity is that even though He stands before us in flesh and blood so that we can see Him, love Him and worship Him, we are so absorbed in our world, that we cannot recognise the Perfect Master. Here, again, He

knows our pre-occupations. He comes and gives a kind pat and alerts us. He teaches us the truth and offers to lead us to Reality. But unless we prepare ourselves, unless we live an honest and truthful life, unless we live a life of *dharma*, we cannot receive His guidance. And His kindness has no bounds; He has come here to take us back to our Real Home. He bestows the boon of *nama* on the chosen few.

We should purify our mind and sit in meditation and acquire the faculty of seeing the glory of *nama*, the glory of His Radiant Form in meditation. That is the essence of all *dharma*.

THE PRACTICE OF DHARMA

THE tendency of man's nature to be good is like the tendency of water to flow downwards. But our involvement in wordly affairs is so total and complete that we have forgotten our real nature of being good, truthful, righteous, compassionate, and virtuous. Only by perfect virtue can the perfect path be made a fact. What is this perfect virtue - what we call *dharma* ? Affability combined with dignity, mildness combined with firmness, bluntness combined with respectfulness, aptness for duty combined with reverent caution, docility combined with boldness, straight forwardness combined with gentleness, easy negligence combined with discrimination, boldness combined with sincerity, and valour combined with righteousness is perfect virtue. If we proceed in this way, though dull we will surely become active; though weak we will become strong.

The Sadguru tells us : Seek and you will find the *dharma*. Neglect and you will lose it. The possession of *dharma* is such a great wealth that no other kind of wealth can equal it. In Tulsidas' *Ram Charit Manas* there is a story in which king Manu performs penance for many years and when God appears before him, he pleads that a boon be bestowed on him. God offers to bestow the boon of the *kalpa-vriksha*, the wishfulfilling tree. The king says that even if he is granted that celestial

tree, he has to keep asking it for things each time. Therefore, the best boon he would ask is the Lord himself. Because the Lord is the real wealth which is permanent. Now, *dharma* helps us to acquire such a lasting wealth. The Guru tells us that 'riches adorn a house, whereas virtue adorns a person.'

Sometimes we think that we are living a virtuous life. Then that virtue must reflect in our lives. But it does not. We think we have overcome anger. But, what truly is within will be manifested without. We know the story of the person who discourses on religion. One day, he was speaking on anger and was asking his audience to emulate his example in overcoming anger. 'I have conquered anger', he said repeatedly. Now, one young man got up and asked him whether the Pandit had really annihilated his anger. The pandit replied 'Yes'.

'That means, you will not be angered by whatever I say?'

The Pandit asserted.

'Now, you will not get angry with me at all, If I insist on knowing it again and again?'

'I do not get angry' is the reply

'That means, whatever be the provocation, you will not get angry?'

'I told you, nothing makes me angry.'

'You must be a saint. That means, even my persistent questioning does not provoke you?'

'You stupid, how many times do I tell I you conquered anger!'

Yes, the young man got his answer. The profession of a virtue is one thing and its practice is

quite another.

The guiding principle of any action must be capable of universal application. Our scriptures prescribe certain practical accessories : these are ten in number known as *Yamas* and *Niyamas*. *Yama* is restraint and *Niyama* is daily observance for the purpose of controlling the body and mind. The five *Yamas* must be deliberately and consciously cultivated. *ahimsa*, non-violence, *satya*, speaking and living truth; *asteya*, abstention from appropriating others' property, *brahmacharya*, non-indulgence in sense-pleasures and; *aparigraha*, abstinence from avarice. Here, *ahimsa* is defined as 'not causing pain to any living creature in any way and at any time'. In other words, *ahimsa* demands friendliness towards all beings. One has to give up hatred, selfishness and jealousy which are the root causes of all injurious behaviour towards others. *Satya* or truth is defined as conformity of word and thought to facts and reality. The other *yamas* - *asteya*, *brahmacharya* and *aparigraha* - are meant to discipline the mind and body and set us in a state of equanimity. Then the five *niyamas* : *shaucha*, cleanliness; *santosha*, contentment; *tapas*, purificatory action; *swadhyaya*, knowledge and; *Ishwara pranidhana*, devotion to God. One can easily appreciate the importance of *yamas* and *niyamas*. *Yamas* are psychological and *niyamas* are physiological controls. These are prescribed to help man to lead a peaceful, contented life which in effect means, living a life of *dharma*.

Dharma has been prescribed for all people and for all times. What was *dharma* in the remote *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* days continues to be a

law of virtue today. There are a number of episodes in these epics which show that all are equal in *dharma* and *dharma* is to be practised by all - men, kings and gods. In Tulsī *Ramayana* an episode is mentioned : Somehow, Shiva's consort had some reservations about the perfect saintliness of Lord Rama. Shiva suggested that she was welcome to clear it. One day, she decided to test Rama. She went in disguise as Sita to the forest hermitage where Rama lived during the 14 years of his *vana vasa*. All that she wanted to test was whether the Lord could see through the disguise and recognise her or, like all human beings, would take her for real Sita and treat her as his wife. She appeared before Lord Rama. Sitting under a tree, Rama saw her and enquired with great politeness and with a graceful smile : 'How have you come all alone, where is Lord Shiva to-day?' Now, she felt so ashamed of herself that she did not stay there for a moment. The all-knowing Rama perceived the doubts that had assailed Lord Shiva's consort and resolved to acquaint her with the Immanence of His divine glory. As she hastened back to Shiva, she saw before her the dazzling form of a smiling Rama accompanied by Sita and his ever faithful and devoted brother Lakshmana. In her perplexity, she turned the other way - and saw before her the magnificent form of Rama there too. When she returned, Shiva asked her what had happened. With a mind full of guilt she said, 'I just went to Lord Rama. I offered my obeisance to the great Lord and came back. That was all.'

Then Shiva said to himself 'The ways of *Kal* people can never understand. He made my wife

speaking a lie. That is outside the *dharma*. Further, I cannot meet her now as my wife any more. In the holy body in which she once assumed the form of Sita and appeared before Lord Rama'. The lesson here is, whether it is men or gods, the *dharma* is one and all are expected to live in *dharma*.

In the *Mahabharat*, a Yudhishtira, the eldest of five Pandavas, is known as *Dharmaputra*, the son of *dharma*, because upholding *dharma* was his sacred creed. Now, the path of *dharma* is exacting and challenging. Any practitioner of *dharma* has to face complex problems in the pursuit. Even this so-called *Dharmaputra*, the epitome of *dharma*, had his weaknesses standing in the way of complete and total-adherence to *dharma*. He had the greatest weakness for gambling. And the game of dice he played with his step-brother Duryodhana made him lose his last garment and quit the kingdom. And, even this *Dharmaputra* had to tell a lie for the sake of expediency when the *Mahabharata* war was being fought. That is why it is said that living a life of *dharma* is an uphill task.

Again, *dharma* is manifold and adherence to all the many features of virtue makes one righteous. One cannot say that he is compassionate to the poor and distribute charity with illgotten money. One does not earn *dharma* by sharing with all men, the wealth he amassed through dishonest means. Again, one cannot tell a lie and say that he uttered it to save the honour of someone. A lie is a lie and a sin whoever speaks and in whatever circumstances he speaks it. One may earn some merit for the good turn. But one has to suffer punishment for infringement of *dharma*. Here, we must

realise that the various aspects of *dharma* are not opposed to each other. The flow of wind does not interfere with the rays of the sun, they say. Confucius said : 'All things are nourished together without their injuring one another. The courses of the seasons and the sun and moon are pursued without any collision among them.'

Dharma always gives happiness. If we think it does not, there is something wrong with our own understanding of the eternal truth. As Tulsidas says : 'If one looks at the moon with a finger across his eye, he will see a dual moon. If he removes his finger, he can see the one single moon in all its splendour' Similarly, only those who have a split mind will see the *dharma* as two. Here is an illustration from the *Mahabharata* : One day during the battle at Kurukshetra, the Pandava armies were beaten badly by the forces of the enemy. In the evening, Yudhishtira accused Arjuna for his follies in strategy and said that the invincible bow of Arjuna proved ineffective and useless. Upon this, Arjuna was enraged. Now, Arjuna had taken a vow that he would kill whoever accused his heaven-given bow, the *gandeeva* Arjuna began preparing to kill Yudhishtira because as a Kshatriya it was his duty to fulfil the vow. Krishna interfered and said : 'The object of duty, the purpose of fulfilment of *Kshatriya dharma* is to bring happiness. Now, by fulfilling this duty thereby killing your dear and venerable brother, do you feel happy? Does this act give you happiness? The duty the fulfilment of which brings only unhappiness is not duty in reality. If you and your brothers think that you would be happy by killing Yudhishtira -

well, by all means 'do it.' Of course, Arjuna could not go against his Guru's will.

Therefore, saints tell us that it should not be that one will cultivate only one aspect of the *dharma* and cannot pursue the other. They say, in fact, if one aspect of *dharma* is sincerely pursued, it leads man through all the order aspects. It is walking a number of steps - all the steps being significant and adaptable. Just as one cannot say that he has reached his destination without walking all the steps, one cannot say that he is living in *dharma* without accepting all aspects of it and without translating all the aspects in action. It is not one's belief or conviction that matters but it is one's practice of the various 'legs' of virtue that brings equanimity in one's life.

This is the principle of inner growth. No amount of outside decoration, no amount of external ornamentation is going to help unless accompanied by inner purity. Saints give the analogy of a peacock. The bird is so beautiful with its most colourful plumage - but it feeds on snakes.

All the religions of the world dwell on one aspect - action, and not speech, which help one to progress spiritually. Material acquisitions never count for spiritual wealth. The Bible says : A man profits very little if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul. Again, the *shariat*, or the *dharma* of Islam, is multifaceted and all-embracing which seeks to regulate the life of man. It is only through the practice of *shariat*, man regulates his life, conditions his thinking, controls his passions and purifies his body and mind. Ramanujacharya says that man's ultimate liberation is through the

practice of *dharma*.

The concept of conscience has been discussed in various ways in Western thought. It is a faculty of discriminating right from wrong, good from evil. We begin with practising what is socially good - and that gives people conscience to practice what is spiritually good. Therefore, the highest loyalty should be given to moral values. In the practice of moral law, one's loyalty to personal or family ties should not be given preference.

We have read the story of the two brothers, Shankha and Likhita. When the younger Likhita committed theft, the elder one sent him to the king to confess his guilt and receive punishment because, the *dharma* he swore by prescribed that that was the right course of conduct. There is another instance from the *Mahabharata*. Gandhari, the queen mother of Duryodhana, pleads with the king Dhritarashtra to banish their son because he was in the wrong and acting in a way which struck at the root of *dharma*. And when, inspite of her protestations, the war was started, prince Duryodhana, her son, came for blessings, she said simply, 'Wherever there is *dharma*, victory will be there.'

Dharma is the same for all ages. But in each age, saints give a particular emphasis so that people understand the meaning and significance of *dharma* and endeavour to practise it in their lives. Gone are the ages of the gold, silver and the bronze. This is the age of iron - the *kali yuga*. And the law of this age - the *yuga-dharma* - is *nama*. The Sadguru tells us that in this age of Kali, *nama* is the the greatest *dharma*. This is not to suggest that *nama* had never been the law of the ages before and

that it is the law only now. Guru Nanak says : *Ek nam yug char udhare* - one *nama* liberated the souls in all the four *yugas*.

It is the wisdom of the saints that they give special stress on particular aspects and enjoin upon us to follow that and practise. They want us to put an end to this seemingly endless cycle of births and deaths by taking recourse to what is the *dharma* of the *kali yuga*. Guru Nanak says : *Kalu ayo Kalu ayo - Nam bowo Nam bowo*. It is almost like a warning : Kali is on us, cultivate the *nama*. That means, for this iron age, the special emphasis is on the *nama*. Only those who acquire the *nama* and cultivate it can contain Kali and withstand its onslaughts.

The saints desire that the cult of *nama* should spread far and wide, and thus save humanity. There is a beautiful story in the life of Guru Nanak. Once the Guru was touring with his disciple Mardana. One day they reached a village in which there was none to receive them. Therefore, the Guru was not offered even food and shelter in the night. Before leaving the place, Nanak said: 'May God keep the village sustained'. Then the Guru and his disciple moved on and reached another village. The people of this village were so glad to receive the Master and with great reverence and humility, they served him. When he came to leave this village, Guru Nanak said: 'May God cause confusion and chaos in this village so that its people run helter-skelter'. On hearing this, the poor disciple was amazed and said to the Guru. 'O great soul, when you left that village which was not living in *dharma*, you wished its people well, And

now when you leave this ideal village, you give a horrible curse. Pray, tell me, the secret of it'.

Upon this the Guru said: 'Why, there is no secret in it. It is as clear as crystal. When I leave this village in which people are adepts in *dharma* and fulfil all their duties, I wish that these people should spread to every nook and corner carrying the message of *dharma*. I mean that wherever there is good, it should not be stagnant but spread and expand, swell and grow, covering everywhere. And earlier, when I left that village I wished that God kept the village sustained because, a people who did not observe *dharma*, who never loved saints, and ignored their basic duty, should stay where they were, should not be allowed to come out and grow.'

Nama represents *dharma*, *Nama* represents God. *Nama* is the real jewel, the resplendent Almighty Maharaj Sawan Singh says that the word *Rama* is the essence of the Pure and Eternal Power, or what we call, the Primordial Energy of the Divine Sound. It is this Supreme Force which is omnipresent; it is here there and everywhere. It is within us too. This Energy has been described as *Rama Nama* by the saints. It is *Rama Nama* which is the creator of the entire universe. It is only to explain to us the glory and might of that Creative Energy, the expression *Rama Nama* has been employed by the saints.

Kabir says: *jag mein Ram hain char, teen Ram vyavahar, chautha Ram nij sar*. That means, in the universe, there are four *Ramas* of which three are known. And the fourth is the Essence of All. It is this Essence on which we have to meditate. Now

who are the three Ramas we know? One—the Rama who lived in the *Treta yuga* as the son of king Dasharatha. Then the Rama in the mind who is called the restless, impatient and entangled Rama. Third, the Rama who is the Brahma, the creator, sustainer as well as destroyer of this universe. Then, the fourth Rama who is beyond all this and who is above mind and matter. That Rama is the *Satpurush*. By singing his glory we tune ourselves with *Rama Nama*, by meditating on Him according to the instructions of the Sadguru, we realise *Rama Nama*. In the mysticism of the saints, this is the ‘inward realisation.’

Now, what Kabir described about the glory of *Rama Nama*, was the same as had been believed and followed by gods and goddesses. For instance, in *Padma Puranu* an interesting episode is mentioned. One day on the Mount Kailas, it was meal time Lord Shiva asked his consort to join him for food. Parvati asked for a little time because she had not finished her daily recitation of the Thousand Names of God. Upon this, Lord Shiva said: ‘Why do the whole thousand: just say *Rama* once, and in that one word, the entire glory of the Almighty Lord is summed up.’ And he said:

*Shri Rama Rameti Rameti Rame Rame manorame
Sahasranama tattulyam Ramanama varanane*

Simply by uttering one word *Rama*, we earn the virtue or merit of uttering all the thousand names of the Lord.

Kabir said: *Ghat ghat mein Ram*. That means, Rama resides in every person, in the heart of every human being. And to reach Him, one does not need to search in temples, mosques, churches

or Gurudwaras. Nor does one need going into forests or up the mountains. One has to simply turn inside his own self, his own body to find Him. That is why the Sadguru repeatedly emphasises that our body which the Lord himself has made and resides, is the Temple of God, the *Hari Mandir*.

But, we have been separated from the Supreme Father many lives ago-taking, each time, the birth of a tree, an insect, a bird or an animal. It is the Almighty's desire that we now endeavour to stop the wheel and to put an end to this cycle of births and deaths, which is why, He is kind to grant us the birth of a human being. Because, the end of this cycle can be sought only in human birth. But by merely having a human birth, one cannot realise the Supreme that is within us in the form of *Om*kara, Divine Melody-also referred to as *Divya Nada* or *Anahad Shabda*, Celestial Unstruck Melody. In order to feast our ears on it, and to be able to bathe in that Resplendent Light, we need the kindly guidance of an Adept, who knows the Path to that Reality, the way to reach that Divine Sound and, who is familiar with the Path.

The person who is well-acquainted with the Path belongs not here to this transient world-but belongs there-from where he comes. He makes daily sojourns in that Supreme Region and extends his kindly hand in help to lead us there. That person is the Perfect Person. He represents the Supreme Power, which is the embodiment of *Eternal Dharma*.

LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

GOD has given us the human life with only one object that we strive and get back to Him in this very life. And to guide us in the Path of spirituality, he comes down to us taking a human form Himself or sends his son here giving him a human-form. He lives amidst us like any one of us but at the divine bidding teaches us how to unravel the mystery of the Universal Self. He tells us that we too can become adepts in the science of spirituality.

From our point of view, all sciences must stand the test of experimentation and proof. Thus, we try to acquire learning in this discipline also. But in spiritual sciences, what we require is not learning, scholarship, or erudition-but knowledge. There we are asked to distinguish between Learning and Knowledge. We have a number of teachers and professors of philosophy and they are all wise and learned. But knowledge - *jnana*-is different. It is knowledge which is the most wonderful pre-requisite for our progress spiritually. It is knowledge which gives the disciple, a spirit of devotion, a sense of dedication to the Messengers of God. With the mind controlled of its sprawling and spreading nature, he can then journey through his Path. The *Gita* says:† “The yogi whose mind is enlightened

with *jnana* (knowledge of the Pristine Spirit), who is unchangeable under all circumstances, whose senses are thoroughly subdued and to whom a clod, a stone and a piece of gold make no difference, is spoken of as a God-realized soul." That is why for acquiring knowledge, devotion is the most basic requisite. We should know that knowledge always leads to devotion and devotion to the knowledge of eternity. Here we have another *shloka* from the *Gita* which says.* "Through devotion he comes to know Me in reality, what I am and who I am, thereby knowing Me in essence, he forthwith enters into Me."

Now, the Sadguru says that mysticism (*Sant Mat*) is a scheme of spiritual development. The scheme is as old as the ancient man. This scheme is not a set of doctrines, not a creed, but a way, a path of spirituality. If it is called a creed, it generally becomes an excuse for the abandonment of the search. We tend to feel cosy and seek comfort in the tenets of the creed. We tend to seek solace in the spiritual achievement of the Masters of the past. It is common knowledge that our people seek the spiritual object by reciting the holy books day in and day out, by writing down a deity's name as *Rama-koti* and by attending discourses on the *Upanishads*, the *Ramayana* and the like. It is a pity that they do not realise that simply by reciting, reading or hearing spiritual texts we cannot realise the object.

This is a science of self-realisation. Whatever doctrine there is, relates to individual experience,

elevation of the self into the Universal Self. To use an image—our theories of the eternal are as valuable as are those which a chick, which has not broken its way through its shell, might form of the outside world. That is why to know the Truth we must tread the path. That is why Jesus had an abhorrence of dogma; his aim was to show only a way of life and lead people back to the Father. He demanded 'a change of outlook, a rejection of instinctive egoism, and of the earthly standards of high learning or erudition.'

This shows that by simply accepting a spiritual system or by acquiring scholarship in the tenets of the system, we cannot achieve anything. On the contrary, as Kabir says: 'Learning makes you, in all truth, a heartless stone; and writing (like *Ramakoti*) makes you just a veritable brick. Love is not born of books, they only tend to make you stone-hearted.'* Further, Kabir says: 'The learning of the learned is like the wisdom of the partridge, which, ignorant of the snare, invites other partridges to join the feast of grains, and then is trapped.' So is the Pandit, ignorant of the trap of Kal, who invites you to the feast of books. In *Dhammapada* it is said: 'What does a spoon know of the taste of the delicious food it conveys?' That is why saints tell us to brush aside all reading and start following the Sadguru with love and devotion. Maharaj Charan Singh very often gives this analogy: 'Just by studying the route-map of a country, one cannot reach there; or simply by mastering the

* Vagvaikhari shabdajhari sastravyakhyana kaushalam
Vaidushyam vidusham tadvad bhuktaye na tu mukhtaye
—Vivekachudamani : Sankaracharya

topography of a place we cannot get there.' The best thing for us, he says, is to start the journey and we will reach there for sure.

Scholastic learning does not lead us anywhere. In matters spiritual, success comes to only those who strive with love and devotion. But because learning is easy we fall easy prey. And through learning we get into doctrinal controversies which are prejudicial to inward peace and spiritual striving-for, we reach here unfathomably deep mysteries on the solution of which thought must not insist.

Traditionally, they say, there are questions which do not deserve to be answered. There are four kinds of questions.

(1) Some can be answered definitely: Will everyone who is born die? 'Yes' is the decisive answer.

(2) Some questions can be answered by resort to division: Is everyone reborn after death? Anyone free from passions is not reborn, while one who is not so is reborn.

(3) Some questions can be answered by counter questions: Is man superior or inferior? The counter question is: In relation to what? If, in relation to animals, he is superior, if in relation to saints, he is inferior.

(4) There are some questions which require to be set aside: Are the aggregates the same as the soul? The question should be addressed to one self and not to anybody.

Soul defies all answers. For, you have to realise the truth about the soul yourself. That is to say, no questions, no scholastic or intellectual discussion is possible in matters pertaining to the soul. It is a mystery which sets a limit to rational thought and

logical definition. It is a mystery which can be unravelled only through personal experience, through journeying inside with the kindly guidance of a Perfect Master. It is a mystery before which words turn back and mind fails to find.

There is a story in the Buddhist texts : Once the Buddha was camping at Kosambi in a grove. And the Exalted one took a few leaves in his hand and said to his disciples: "What do you think, my disciples, which are the more-these few leaves which I have gathered in my hand, or the other leaves yonder in the grove?" "The few leaves, sir, which the Buddha holds in his hand are not many, but many, more are those leaves yonder in the grove." "So also, my disciples, is that much more, which I have learned and have not told you, than that which I told you. And why have I not told you that? Because, it brings you no profit, it does not conduce to progress in holiness, because it does not lead to the turning from the earthly to the subjection of all desire, to the cessation of the transitory to peace, to knowledge, to illumination. Therefore, I have not declared it to you."

This is precisely why, saints do not tell us things which they think are not essential for us in our spiritual pursuit. There is the famous analogy that when a man is thirsty, his immediate quest should be for water. It will be futile if he begins to dig a well. There is another story from the life of the Buddha. The Buddha had a disciple by the name Malunkya-putta who was dissatisfied with his Master because he would not answer some metaphysical questions. The disciple challenged the Buddha and said: "If the Lord answers them, I will

lead a religious life under him; if he does not answer them, I will give up religion and return to the world. If the Lord does not know, then the straight forward thing to say is, I do not know." With a quite courtesy, the Buddha said that he did not offer to answer the questions, and gave a parable : "A man is hit by a poisoned arrow. His friends call in a doctor. The doctor is about to draw the arrow out of the wound. The wounded man, however, cries, 'Stop, I will not have the arrow drawn out until I know who shot it-whether a woman, or a man, a Brahmin or a Shudra, whether he was tall or short and what species and description the arrow was' and so on. What would happen? The man would die before all these questions were answered".

In the same way, the man who was feeling thirsty and who rejected the offer of water and who began to dig a well instead, would die of thirst before the well was dug. Similarly, a disciple who insists on knowing unnecessary, futile points about spirituality, would die before he knew the truth about suffering-the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way to cessation of suffering. Even if a kindly teacher offers to tell him, his life is so short to know these things.

Now, the aim of saints is intensely practical, to encourage their disciples to control the mind and not to indulge in speculation. They ask their disciples to follow them and realise the essence of spirituality for themselves. This is a sphere where theoretical learning or great erudition is futile, as it is futile even in some of the material situations. We know the story of the Brahmin and the boatman: Once a Brahmin was crossing a river in a boat. So

boastful of his learning and scholarship, he asked the boatman whether he studied grammar and poetics. The boatman, poor and unlettered, said he did not study. The Pandit then asked him whether he learnt astrology. The boatman said 'no'. The epitome of erudition, then enquired whether the boatman knew the scriptures. The boatman replied in the negative. Upon this, the Brahmin said that he was sorry for the poor boatman who had spent his life in vain. A little later, the sky was suddenly overcast and clouds gathered in a thick, black blanket and it threatened to break in a storm. Fierce winds began tossing the boat violently. The boat was about to capsize. Then the boatman shouted at the Pandit: 'Have you learnt swimming?' The Brahmin had not learnt swimming and said so. 'Then, all your learning cannot save you now. You can save yourself only if you have learnt swimming!'

The great Sufi saint Rumi tells us a similar story in his famous *Masnavi*. In this case, the scholar learnt and mastered those sciences which could not come to his rescue when his life was in danger. Now what can his learning do to help him in his spiritual life? The boatman, on the other hand, learnt well the most important thing in his profession and, therefore, could save himself.

In this context, we may refer to the Upanishads which are the greatest repositories of ancient Indian spiritual thought. The young boy Nachiketa, in the *Kathopanishad*, wants to know from Yama, the Lord of Death, the truth about the soul-whether it exists or does not exist. Yama tells him that even the gods of old had doubts on this and that

it is not easy to understand. But the boy insists on being revealed the truth. Yama offers to bestow many material riches on the boy but he is persistent. He says that the world is transient, wealth is impermanent and, therefore, he has no use for either, and implores the Lord of Death to reveal the truth to him. Then Yama pleased with the boy's insistence says: 'Fools steeped in ignorance, wise in their own conceit and regarding themselves as learned, go about staggering like blind men led by the blind. Not by argument is this knowledge obtained. But, when taught by a 'different man' it is easy to understand. And holding fast to truth by wisely preferring the good to the pleasant, you have obtained it now.' And finally Yama wishes: 'May we always have an enquirer like you, O Nachiketa!'

Now, this wish of Yama has special significance for us--'May we always have an enquirer like you'--that an enquirer into spiritual truth must have perseverance with devotion. An enquirer must have a rare kind of insistence on acquiring knowledge and *not* scholarship which only provokes argument, logic and vain discussion. Another important point we may learn from this story is that--given the devotion, dedication and perseverance, one can know the truth about the self which is beyond all intellect or learning. And, it can be known only by the one whom He chooses. He has been chosen by the Lord and, rightly, the disciple has prepared himself to receive the knowledge. He craved for the knowledge; he pined to know the truth by shunning all offers of material comforts and riches.

Similarly, the Sadguru chooses souls to reveal the

mystery, to take them back into Him. But people are so much engrossed and immersed in the affairs of the world-pursuit of pleasure, pursuit of riches, pursuit of learning-which they think will give honour and dignity and self-realisation also. They never crave to see the Lord, never pine to have the true knowledge which will take them face-to-face to Him. They never care to shed a tear pining for the Lord. And unless they crave intensely-weep and wail within-they do not prepare to see Him. In other words, their cup will not be ready to be filled.

The aim of Sant Mat is to make man what he really is. That is, man has to grow into his self-in other words, realise his self. It is possible to attain that state in this life-before the death of the body. One's spiritual life should be plunged in self-realisation, its aim is self-realisation, its end is self-realisation. The sense of selfhood is completely killed in it. And none can describe that spiritual feeling adequately. In his commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*, Sankaracharya recounts that the teacher, when requested to explain the nature of the self, kept silent and to the repeated enquiries of the pupil, gave the answer: 'Verily, I tell you but you understand not, the self is silence' Again, in the *Dakshinamurti Stotra*, it is said: 'Wonderful is it that there under a banyan tree, the pupil is old while the preceptor is young. The teaching of the preceptor is by silence, but the doubts of the pupil are dispersed.'

The eternal truth has no words for its expression: the Absolute is free from the predicates of existence. 'The highest truth is silence, because whereof one

cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.' But all the doubts of the disciple are cleared by the Guru which pre-supposes total devotion, dedication and surrender on the part of the disciple. That which cannot be comprehended by mere learning, can be accomplished by knowledge one gets through the spiritual guidance of the Sadguru. Truth is a sacred achievement, not a plaything of the dialectician. It can be achieved by the practice of the *Shabda Yoga*; by great love and devotion to the Sadguru. It is not achievable by any other means. For it is said: 'There the eye goes not speech goes not, nor the mind. We know not, we, understand not how one would teach or, how one would learn it.'

There is a story about a Brahmin who was well-versed in the *Bhagavad Gita*. He was eager to teach the *Gita* to the king of the land. One day, he approached the ruler and told him that he would like to teach the *Gita* to him. The king told him that he should go back and read the holy book once more. The Brahmin did as suggested and came back to the king. This time, again, the king asked him to read the *Gita* all over again. The Brahmin was surprised how the king was insisting that he should study the *Gita* again and again. Now, he told the king that he was thorough with the text and could teach him well. But, again, the king suggested that the Brahmin should read the text once more.

The Pandit did not return to the court for a long time. And wondering what happened to the Brahmin, the king himself went in search and finally found him. 'Why have you not come to me

again?" the king asked. The Brahmin smiled, meaningfully. Now, it was evident that the king was more conversant with the significance and spiritual import of the *Gita* and, as such, knew that the text was not something to be commented upon or discussed or taught. That is why he asked repeatedly that the Brahmin should go back and study with the hope that he would understand and grasp the meaning. And once he tried to comprehend the import of the text, he realised the futility of his offer and felt ashamed of it. That is why, he did not go to the king again.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says: The Eternal Spirit or the Universal Father is the only permanent feature-and nothing of the created world is permanent. To know about the Eternal Spirit is knowledge-and nothing else can be termed as knowledge. In the Sikh scriptures it is stated. 'That which is based on learning or intellect or on recitation cannot be called knowledge.' Proceeding ahead, the *Gurbani* explains what is knowledge: 'The experience of *Shabd*, *Nam*, Truth and *Bhajan*, is knowledge; that sound which emanates naturally from the Eternal and echoes in every one of us continually and always is knowledge.' Again, 'knowledge is light, knowledge is devotion, knowledge is permanent,' says Guru Amar Das. It is through knowledge man becomes complete man, man becomes one with the Super Man. It is also said that in spiritual ascent, achieving the brilliance of the Sun and the Moon constitutes the Path of Knowledge or *Jnana marga*.

The Guru is the embodiment of knowledge and through the Master alone we can achieve knowledge.

Knowledge grows through devotion to the Guru. Because, it can be accomplished only through the One, the Sadguru, who had accomplished it in its entirety. It is a great gift that the Sadguru bestows on a devoted disciple. He gives the gift through preparing us well with *Simiran* and *Dhyan* and controlling the mind. He warns us that those given to egoism, pride, anger cannot come anywhere near a Sadguru who is the only bestower of knowledge. Through knowledge, the Master takes us away from the trappings of the material world. It is said that for the elephant of the mind, the Sadguru is the *mahout* who wields the weapon of knowledge to subdue it.

In *Sar Bachan*, Swamiji Maharaj emphatically states that intellect is utterly unsuitable for gauging the depth of the Ultimate Reality. By study of books, we may be able to understand, to an extent, various theories of Reality, but Reality itself remains beyond the reach of the intellect. He says : His own intellect doth each strain; but the mystery of Reality hath not been solved. By *Shabd* practice is this secret known; and not by any thinking and reasoning of the intellect. Give up thou, thy thinking and take thou to the practice of *Shabd*; then something of Reality shalt thou find '.

The true form of the soul can be seen only by the inner spiritual eye, and not by our external eyes, nor can it be known by intellect or thinking or reasoning. Therefore, it becomes clear that by learning and scholarship we can achieve nothing. And all achievement is possible only through true knowledge which can be accomplished through love and devotion to the Sadguru who will grant us the much-needed insight into the inner verity.

TRUE FREEDOM

FETTERED people crave for independence. Nations in bondage long for liberty. Restrained communities yearn for freedom. The uppermost thought would be to assert the will of the people, to establish the rule of the people, by the people, for the people. It is a feeling which reflects the ambition of men fallen into a morass. The situation throws up a leader and all men traverse to freedom under his captaincy.

Leaders tell us that unless freedom is won, the country will not be able to come into its own, it will not be able to play its role in the comity of nations. People fight for liberty sacrificing almost everything they covet. And when the country becomes free, people expect a miracle to happen, hope that the country will be turned into a great heaven. Again, leaders tell people that political freedom is only the first step in a nation's search for self-discovery; it is the economic freedom that can usher in an era of happiness. Now, let us see. If economic freedom—a self-reliant economy—can lead to human happiness, the most affluent nations of the West who have a sound economic base and can command every physical facility, can fulfil every material want and enjoy every worldly comfort, should be the happiest. Economically advanced countries should be abodes of happiness.

But what is the truth? Affluence robs peace,

robs true happiness. That means, neither political liberty, nor economic freedom can bring human happiness. Political freedom gives the nation an individuality, the right to act according to its own will and judgment. Economic independence provides the base to act freely. Both are necessary for the progress of people, for the well-being of the nation. But both are incapable of bringing true happiness because they do not constitute freedom in the true sense of the word.

Political freedom gives power, office. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely--leading to dissensions and downfall. Economic freedom leads to egotistic attitudes, recklessness and tumbling down. To cover up one lapse, another folly is committed--the whole thing snowballs, becomes a boulder and crushes men in power. Where is the happiness?

Here, kindly voices of realised souls ring in our ears. True freedom lies in freedom from the trappings of the world; liberty from the snares of the universe. That is, freedom to seek liberation of the soul, freedom to worship the Supreme Being, and freedom to merge in the Supreme Being.

The removal of economic poverty and so-called intellectual ignorance is the business of the worldly rulers or democracies. Spiritual uplift is not dependent upon economic uplift nor intellectual development. Neither is spiritual development a national affair. It is the affair of the individual. He enters the world alone and goes out alone. The Divine Current is present in everyone, irrespective of his financial position or intellectual development and everyone is *free* to rise up within himself.

In other words, man has the freedom to go within. Or, man's freedom lies in going within himself. It also means that man's freedom lies in liberating himself of all afflictions of the mind, of all passions and desires and, finally, of all earthly bonds. Once man is able to free himself of all wordly attachments, he becomes free to rise up within himself in order to meeting his Beloved. That is real freedom.

The Sadguru says . "In man, the soul is hopelessly and helplessly entangled in a most complicated snare. There are the chains of lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride; there are the three states of tranquility, activity and sloth of the mind. there are the 25 conditions like weeping, smiling etc to which he is subject: there are the three bodies—the physical, the astral and the causal, which serve as cages; and there are the three minds or three aspects of one mind, working one in each body or cage." The only means through which the soul can become free of all the bonds is *Dhyana*. Meditation is the only means through which one can cut the chains and free the soul from all the snares of the world. As the Master explains, when one is connected with the Divine Melody by a Sant Sadguru and brings his attention nearer and nearer to the *Shabda Current*, he is cutting the bonds. The soul is thus becoming free. That is how man becomes free. That is real freedom.

"What light is to the eyes, what air is to the lungs, what love is to the heart, liberty is to the man--and that lies in the liberation of the soul." Freemen set other men free; liberated souls liberate other souls. Maharaj Charan Singh often mentions

the episode of the Compassionate One. "In a jail there are a number of prisoners. One day, a kind-hearted man goes to the prison and pays some money for supply of cold water to the prisoners every day during summer months. This man has done a good thing indeed for the prisoners because he has arranged cold refreshing water during hot days. The prisoners are happy. After some time, another kind-hearted person who is sorry at the plight of the prisoners getting inadequate and poor food, has provided them with wholesome food. The prisoners are happy because they can eat delicious food to their stomach's content. This is a great service to the prisoners. Then, after some time, a third kind-hearted person who sees the prisoners shiver in winter for want of warm clothing, pities their plight. He spends a large sum of money and provides them with woollen clothing. This is a greater service the kind-hearted person has done to the prisoners. Life has become comfortable with supplies of cold drinking water during summer, wholesome food and comfortable warm clothing in winter.

All the three benefactors have done their best to improve the lot of the prisoners. 'C' class prisoners have begun to enjoy the comforts of 'A' class prisoners. But they remain prisoners all right—never being allowed to go out. They cannot enjoy the freedom of free persons. Then comes a fourth kind-hearted, compassionate person. He brings the key of the prison-house and opens its gates and sets the prisoners free for ever. Now, it is clear that the kindest act of the fourth is the most significant act of mercy so far as human

freedom and human happiness are concerned.

Saints come into this world with the key of the prison of the world. By creating love of God and by explaining to us the real purpose of life and the anatomy of true freedom, they release us from the bonds of the world, from the shackles of worldly attachments. Therefore, true happiness comes only from true freedom and those who give us true freedom and through it true happiness are true saints. And these wise men explain to us that as long as the soul does not return to its Original Abode and merge in the Original Spirit—the Supreme Being—it is inevitable that men suffer from the misery of worldly birth and death.

Swamiji Maharaj says that this is not our home and our aim should be to seek deliverance and somehow reach our Abode. This is an alien land, why should we stay here? Come, let us move on to our homeland. He says :

Dham apna chalo bhai, paraya desh kyon rehna? Again, Kabir says . “O bird of heaven, let us fly away from this land to *Sat Lok!*” That is true freedom

Lord Buddha says : “People are in bondage because they have not yet removed the idea of self.” This means that as long as we do not shed the notion of existence of individual self, we should think that we are still in fetters, in bondage. The Buddha says that life in this world of phenomenon is marked by misery and suffering and whatever wealth, riches and affluence one may seem to enjoy here, is not enjoyment because it is not real or permanent. Further, the Buddha says, true happiness is possible only in a state of *nirvana*, enlighten-

ment-which cannot be explained but can only be experienced. That state is variously described as 'highest bliss', 'the other shore', 'the refuge', 'the goal.' No words are capable of describing fully the content of that experience—for language is bound to the earth, to human existence. Therefore, saints use mystic words of expression.

Everything that has an end involves suffering; everything that is transient causes misery. Bliss or merging in the Supreme One is the fourth world and is distinguished from the other three spheres of existence, desire and form which are impermanent. Only the sphere of *merger* is unchangeable and stable. Only that sphere is the highest and impassable. It is the most brilliant and the most blissful sphere. Union or merger is therefore *Ananda*, true happiness. And Indian spiritual thought has always identified *Ananda* as *Brahman*. In the Upanishads it is stated : *Anando Brahma*. Where there is bliss, there is *Brahman*, the Supreme Being. In Christianity, Lord's spirit pervades heaven. And where the spirit of Lord is—there Liberty is.

That means true freedom, true liberty can be obtained only in the region where the Supreme Lord resides. That is why, saints tell us that material freedom is meaningless when the ultimate objective of man is considered. The soul cries for deliverance: 'For what sin should I be compelled to remain in this dungeon of the world of form and appearance?' This is the true cry that dwells in all noble men. But it is the mind which is the villain of the piece. It tries ceaselessly to divert our attention towards worldly freedom which gives political

power, authority, and influence over men.

Political freedom has its limits; political power has its restrictions. It is said that when France was declared an independent Republic, a woman was so excited about the thought of freedom, that she took a long bamboo pole and started dancing in the middle of a public thoroughfare. She caused nuisance to other passers-by. They protested that she should not inconvenience others. Upon that she said: "I am a free citizen; none can question my actions. I must enjoy my freedom, none can stop me now." People were aghast. One man stepped forward and said: "I agree that you are free; but your freedom ends where my nose begins!" Therefore, freedom does not lie in unrestricted action. Similarly, political power in a free country has its own limitations.

Power causes intoxication. In his discourses the Sadguru describes vividly the plight of political leaders. In the hour of glory they command the loyalty and respect of every citizen. When people arrange receptions, rallies or processions, when the press compliments the successes, when poets sing of their achievements, leaders are happy; leaders grow more ambitious-which gives rise to protest and opposition. We read in newspapers everyday of a revolt here or a coup there. When opposition becomes stronger, it succeeds in toppling men in power. In some cases, the leaders are either shot dead or hanged. If they could escape death by the skin of their teeth, they would be in for impeachment or something like that. Not infrequently, leaders are thrown in jails to suffer humiliation and misery. Therefore, the Sadguru says: The power that they once regarded as a

means to happiness, becomes a source of misery and suffering

And rightly, saints warn us that we cannot enjoy real and true happiness in this world because the freedom we seem to enjoy here is not true freedom. But they tell us that every human being is capable of achieving that 'true freedom' i.e. knowledge of the self in this very life, living in this very body. They say, realising one's self is achieving true freedom which leads to true happiness. The first step towards true freedom is, surrendering our freedom, our will to the will of God. Our true self, which is an eternal mode of God, has degenerated into ego by becoming a mode of matter. We have to free ourselves from this ego by surrendering ourselves to God. Our freedom-a gift of God-finds fulfilment of its purpose when we live in conformity with the will of God, who is our Divine Source. According to St. John, the Lord says : "I am the way, the truth, and the life." That means, God is the Truth, God is the *hita*, the way and the means; and He is the *purushartha*, the Supreme Goal

Once we surrender our will to God, the vision of God is vouchsafed to us by God himself out of his infinite love and grace. And vision of God is the true feature of true freedom. *Mukti*-or true freedom-is beyond the range of materialism and mentalism and involves the intuition and attainment of the infinite. It is that infinite, the Eternal Spirit, which controls the universe. That spirit is absolutely good and the redeemer of all beings-which sets all beings free. That is true freedom.

In the pursuit of true freedom, self-effort and divine grace are not opposed to each other: divine grace is not conditional. The breeze of divine grace is blowing, but we must set sail to catch it, says Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. We must love God, serve him, and meditate on him and through these, spiritual hunger grows within us. Then we experience love and divine grace flowing from God and filling our whole being. The culmination of spiritual experience is realising God's unbounded love and finding complete refuge in him. To find complete refuge in him, is total self-surrender, a union of our will with the will of the Lord. That union gives us true freedom bringing true happiness.

When our self, our will becomes one with the Supreme Self and unites with the will of the Lord, it is stripped of its self-hood and sense of separateness and shakes off the shackles of *karma*. That is the state of true freedom. That is the state of union we should crave for. We should become one with the Supreme Soul in a state of inseparableness 'as fire and its burning power, as flower and its fragrance, as sugar and its sweetness.'

Saints tell us that man need not wait till death to attain deathlessness, to achieve freedom from death, to attain that true freedom which enables us to experience true happiness. It is possible in this very life when we are enjoying the human birth. And saints also warn us that each moment that passes is precious and we must utilise it to our fullest spiritual advantage. And if we fail, we waste away a precious moment of our life which can never be regained. We have read that on the ancient sundials there used to be inscribed a warning that

man's sojourn on earth was of short duration:

Amend today and slack not

Death comes and warns not

Time passes and speaks not.

The moments of existence are but passing clouds on an internal horizon. We are just specks in the eternal wheel of time. Even gods are not beyond the time-cycle. There is the story of Indra, who became more and more ambitious as his power grew. He desired to build a beautiful palace. Vishwakarma, the royal architect, was desperate. And the Supreme Lord promised to help.

A thin, handsome boy entered Indra's court and addressed him saying: "O Indra, kindly tell me, how long will it take to complete construction of this magnificent mansion you have planned? I wonder, because no Indra before you has ever succeeded in finishing his palace!" Indra was startled and asked the boy: "Are there many Indras you have seen or heard of?" Upon this, the boy replied: "Yes, O Indra, I have known every dissolution of the universe at the end of each age, when the entire world dissolves into the waters of infinity and gets created once again. Each universe, each age, has its Indra. And none has had the time to complete the mansion. All this is but like a dream and that is why those possessed of wisdom do not attach themselves to anything; the enlightened are not bound to anything at all." Indra had learnt his lesson.

Here, we quote another interesting story from the *Ramayana*. It occurs during Rama's *Vanavasa*, the sojourn in the forest. One day, there is no stock of wheat flour in the kitchen. Rama asks Hanu-

man to fetch some flour from a woman grinding flour in a mountain cave some distance away. Rama gives his golden ring to be shown to the woman for identification. Hanuman reaches that mountain and approaches the old woman. He tells her that the flour is required for the Lord's kitchen and gives her the ring. She asks him to throw the ring in the well nearby and come back to collect the flour. When Hanuman reaches the well, he finds it full of countless similar golden rings. Hanuman is stunned. Back at the cave, he is told by the old woman. "There were hundreds of Hanumans before you. Innumerable Ramas before this master of yours was born and all of them came here, wanted wheat flour from me and sent Hanumans with their signet rings!" By this Hanuman comes to know the truth of the cycle of time, the passage of *yugas*, each turn of the wheel causing the advent of the Lord with all the attendant paraphernalia. Hanuman realises the impermanence of time, its constant movement and his own state as a bird of passage. And that through devotion and love to his Lord, he should seek to escape the merciless fangs of time; that he should utilise every moment of his life according to the will of his master.

Now, this shows that time is fleeting and we cannot stop it. We cannot achieve anything in material terms and whatever we achieve will be impermanent so far as we are concerned. Therefore, saints tell us that it should be our endeavour to utilise every moment of our life in order to earn true freedom, true happiness—not only in this life but also beyond it. For him who has achieved

liberation during life, the vision of the world has changed into the vision of the final Reality. He is then called 'the living free' For him, delusion is gone forever. He is free from all selfish desire, for all sense of want in him is extinguished by the effable experience of the self. His only delight is in God.

Liberation is the state which results when the bonds of ignorance have been burst asunder, and implies freedom not only from all imperfections and limitations, but also from birth and death. The attainment of true freedom is the attainment of immortality—which is the source of true happiness. In the *Mahabharata*, Yudhishtira once asks Bhishma: "What do you regard to be the greatest of all *dharmas*?" Bhishma replies: "By reciting what, beings will be liberated from the eternal cycle of birth and death." That is, the recitation of God's name, remembrance of the Lord, living in the thought and will of God. There are four things—*recitation, remembrance, thought*, and eventually merging in His will. Now, we may change their order but all the four are interdependent. One leads to the other and each draws sustenance from the other. Like the four *padas* of *dharma*, one aspect does not clash with any other aspect. If we are reciting the name of the Lord with utmost concentration, collecting all our senses at the eye-focus, we will remember the Lord and not only that, we will be living in His august presence. And one who is ushered into His presence, has always Him in his thought and always lives in His will.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, there is a simple but profound utterance: 'to live, move and have one's

being in God' should be the object of human existence. That is, self-surrender, surrendering our will to the will of the Supreme Being. That is, renunciation of material attainments and accomplishments. Once Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was asked, 'What does the *Gita* teach?' He replied, "If you utter the word *Gita* a few times, you begin to say 'tagi', 'tagi'. That means, *tyagi*, one who has renounced, one who has surrendered to the will of the Lord." And, renunciation, is the beginning, the middle, and the end of spiritual life

The teaching of the saints is that one need not escape into the forest and shun the duties of every day life. What is required is a mind free from attachment and thoughts of worldly gain; devoted entirely to the adoration of the Supreme Being. We have to do the work allotted to us, humbly, honestly and energetically, as trustees, as employees, rather than owners. Not our will, but God's; not our decision but God's; not our desires but God's—should be our basic attitude. And once this attitude is firmly set, the rest of the things will automatically follow. Recitation of His name, remembrance of Him, living in His thoughts and living within His will flow from this attitude.

But cultivation of such an attitude is not an easy thing. If we have political freedom, we think we are great; if we have economic freedom, we think we are strong. It is futile to have these and lose the essential object of human life. These freedoms are neither true nor permanent. Supreme love, divine knowledge, true meditation and true action are the dispensers of true freedom, true happiness. The *Kathopanishad* says: "The one Ruler,

the self within all beings who makes His one form manifold--the wise who perceive Him within themselves, to them belongs eternal happiness, not to others "

Sant Mat emphasises that supreme love which creates devotion and which prompts true action leading to true meditation—is the most effective instrument in self-realisation. We may recall what Swami Vivekananda said of love, of *bhakti*: "It is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in Love. One single moment of the madness of extreme love of God brings us eternal freedom." But we are in such an ignorant state that we think those who bathe in the bliss of true freedom are mad. The world called Meerabai mad, when she was drunk with true happiness of surrender to her Lord. When Shri Chaitanya danced in ecstasy being one with his Beloved, people laughed at him. It is well known that Shri Chaitanya cared only for love of God and never bothered himself with the problems of the phenomenal nature of the universe etc. If one loves God, one need not bother about philosophical problems. And to attain that love of the Lord, saints tell us, we have to practise ethical values, particularly humility and forbearance.

Humility lies in surrendering our will to the will of the Master and forbearance lies in restraining ourselves from the trappings of the world, in patient waiting for the Master's grace and mercy. And once that comes—and it is sure to come—we will be able to rid ourselves of the filthy, profane motivations of the mind and be a free soul—a pristine, pure soul—to enjoy the eternal, blissful free-

dom of the Fourth World That should be the aim of our life; that should be our goal—the merger of the individual soul with the Eternal, Universal and Supreme Entity. Call it *Moksha*, *Nirvana* or the Kingdom of Heaven or *Anami Lok*. That is the Refulgent Region in which Love, Beauty and Goodness exist eternally—of which none will be able to describe adequately.

And the Sadguru emphasizes that salvation is not to be attained only at the end of one's life. By living in the world with one's inward being profoundly modified; by allowing the soul to take possession of itself so that it cannot be shaken from its tranquility by the machinations of the mind, one can experience salvation—or what we may call, true freedom, in this very life, long before the end of our worldly sojourn.

And here, the Sant Sadguru who has to lead us to true freedom, watches our progress with loving care. Like a kindly father, He corrects our faltering steps, holds our arm and leads us across and ahead, into the Eternal Sphere, into the Supreme Being. When the cosmic process results in the revelation of all as the sons of God, all the Lord's people become one with Him; become eligible to enjoy true freedom. Only, what is expected of us, we have to perform. Love of the Master who comes down from His Eternal Seat to this universe to release us; worship of that Sadguru with all humility and pure thinking and pure living is what is expected of us. We must make ourselves worthy of traversing from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to deathlessness. The state of deathlessness is the true freedom our

soul can enjoy It deserves such true enjoyment, such true happiness But first of all, we must deserve such a merciful benediction by our Sant Sadguru. It is the Sadguru—and Sadguru alone—who can help us to rise high and higher internally into His region. He is the embodiment of divine love and can be attained only through true love, true dedication, true surrender

Our belief and motive of action should be as Guru Nanak said: "My body is of my Guru, my wealth is of my Guru and my mind too I have offered to my Guru." True surrender brings true freedom and true freedom brings true happiness That is the teaching of Sant Mat All saints say this; the Sadguru says this. We have only been hearing them say what is truth, what is sweetness It is time we started acting—to experience that truth, to taste that sweetness—the sweet experience of True Freedom.

OUR BODY IS OUR TEMPLE

A cardinal precept in the teachings of all saints is the existence of the kingdom of God within each and every human being. The same truth is reiterated by all *Sant Sadgurus*.

The Supreme Being has blessed us with a human body and endowed it with certain latent faculties in order that the spirit-entities may be able to establish contact with the Supreme Lord. The faculties afford us an opportunity to derive maximum benefit from the human body. And God has been kind to send, from time to time, holy souls into our midst in order that the mankind is acquainted with these gifts and their great utility. The holy souls in human form whom we love and worship as Sadgurus, are fully conversant with the secrets pertaining to these faculties, the practical methods of awakening them and utilising them. They are fully competent to explain these secrets to us because they had unravelled the Truth and live in Truth, therefore, they are the embodiments of Truth, who can explain the whole process of comprehending the various faculties God has granted us and, through it merge in Him.

Man should make it the aim of his life to become aware of his faculties of all the three kinds gross or physical, subtle or mental and spiritual or causal *Sthoola*, *Sukshma* and *Karana shareeras* in order to throw off ignorance and in-

action. The gross body is made up of the five elements - ether, air, fire, water and earth.* After death, these five elements resolve into their respective spheres. The subtle body is composed of the subtle parts of the elements to form the germ of the body. The psychological apparatus of the body are the senses, the mind and the breath-functioning through the five *jnanendriyas*, perceptive faculties, and the five *karmendriyas* faculties of action. These ten faculties are governed by a central faculty called *Manas*, the mind. The sense organs are compared to horses drawing the car of the body, and mind to the bridle. The *Kathopanishad** describes the body as a chariot the intellect as charioteer and the mind as the reins.

Closely connected with the three divisions of the faculties is the other five - fold division of the individual souls called the five *Atmans* - *Annamaya* (food), *Pranamaya* (breath), *Manomaya* (mind) *Vijnanamaya* (knowledge and) *Anadamaya* (bliss). Stripping off these 'sheaths' one by one and penetrating deeper, one reaches the innermost recesses of the essential being of Man. That essential being is not a material object that can be seen by the naked eye. He is perceived only by the inner vision, by true wisdom which can be acquired only through the kindly guidance of a Perfect Living Master.

The *Shvetasvatara Upanishad* mentions that the great spirit is always dwelling in the beings of all and that there is absolutely no distinction whatever between the individual soul and the Eternal

soul. The inner soul is as immortal and as indestructible as the Universal Soul. It has no birth, no death. The migrating soul is said to be born and die only with reference to the body. The individual soul which does not receive spiritual enlightenment has to whirl round innumerable turns of births to get release.

If we think deeply, the Sadguru says, creation appears to be a wonderful merry-go-round. All the souls inhabiting this material world are divided into five classes, according to the quantity of *tattvas*, essence of elements, in each living being.

The vegetable kingdom is the first, in which only water is the active element - the other four elements are dormant in it. Then, the insect world in which two elements - fire and air are active and the other three are dormant. The third, is the egg-born creatures - the winged variety - which have three elements namely, water, fire and air, are prominent, and the other two are inactive. Animal kingdom is the fourth, in which only ether is dormant and all the remaining four are present. That is why, animals do not have intellect. And, the fifth category is the human beings in whom all the five elements are present. That is why man is often referred to as the 'top of creation'. But, the Sadguru says, unless and until man succeeds in freeing his soul from the bondage of these five elements, as also the 25 *prakritis*, the three *gunas* - *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* - and the mind, he cannot comprehend God and His creation.

If human form is the 'top of creation', it is for the simple reason that man has the capacity to comprehend not only the mystery of God's creation

but also seek to attain to Him. Saints warn us that if this is not done, man would miss the golden opportunity and remain a kind of two-legged animal, a slave of the senses and the objects of senses. As long as he is a slave of lust, anger, greed, attachment and pride, he will not be qualified to understand the secret of God's creation.

In a profound letter, Maharaj Sawan Singh tells us of the five stages on our path of understanding of the Supreme Soul. He describes them as the main stations in our journey. (1) *Pinda* the part below the eyes. (2) *Anda* from the eye focus up to the beginning of *Triukuti*, is the second stage. (3) *Brahmanda* from the bottom of *Trikuti* up to the broder of the Tenth Door. (4) *Par Brahma* from the bottom of the Tenth Door, to the top of *Bhamvar Gupha* (*Bhramara guha*), and (5) *Sach Khand* and the stages above it, which constitute pure Spiritual Region. This is the only eternal, unchangeable, indestructible part *Anda Pinda* and *Brahmand* are therefore, transient.

The Sadguru gives a beautiful analogy to describe that *Anda* is the reflection of *Brahmanda* and *pinda* is the reflection of *Anda* - just as the sun and its reflection in water, and the reflection on a wall from the surface of water are related to one another. The sun is in the sky with all its magnificence, its image in the water has the appearance of the sun, but has lost much of its power and magnificence. The reflection on the wall is only a hazy patch of light, without the sun's glory. *Pinda* is a copy of *Anda*. *Anda* is a copy of *Brahmanda*. Thus, man's body below the eye - centre is a copy of the copy - who has lost direct touch or contact

with the Pure Spirit which can be felt and realised above the eye centre.

Normally man works from the heart center. With some effort, he rises above the heart center whenever deep thinking is required. Man sits at the middle of the mountain - his base is the rectum and the top is the eye centre. The heart is the midway point. Saints explain to us that it is waste of time and energy first to go down to the rectum and then come up. Instead, we should proceed rightway to the eye-focus where the Sadguru awaits our arrival and receives us with all compassion and mercy, and takes us further up. The saints discard *Pinda* and straightway lead us to *Anda* and on to the *Brahmanda* and beyond to the *Sach*.
Khand

God manifests Himself as the Perfect Master whenever mankind needs divine guidance. And Perfect Masters re-state the ancient truth in a way comprehensible to the people of the time. The age, country and incarnation never interfere with the ancient wisdom, the eternal message. The paths may be many, depending on the compulsions of time, but the goal is one. All the Masters of the past have described the glorious human body as the only means to attaining to the Almighty - because, when God created man, He manifested Himself as man. That is, God is in every human being. In order to know Him and to reach Him, one has only to go *inside himself*.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord says that this body is the field and one who knows this is called the knower. That is, whatever there is that belongs to man, is within his body; whatever he is

ordained to do, he should do within the field of his body. It also means, all that is knowable can be obtained within this human body. That is the essence of spirituality; that is the essence of all religions of the universe - in whichever land they have been propounded and to whichever age they have been preached. The *Gita* also says that truth about the field, i.e. the human body, and spiritual knowledge of the field have been glorified in the Vedic chants also. The *Gita* goes on to explain what is the composition of this field: The five subtle elements - ether, air, fire, water and earth - the ego, the intellect, Primordial Matter, the ten organs, the mind and the five objects of sense, (sound, touch, colour, taste and smell). Then come desire, aversion, pleasure, pain and consciousness.

To understand the nature of the body is to unravel the truth about it all. In a way, it is an operation of sieving off the unwanted and impermanent things and preserving and developing the good and spiritual faculties. The sage Kapila who wrote the *Sankhya* Yoga (Yoga of the Discriminative Knowledge) describes these aspects in these words : *Prakriti* (nature) has three *gunas* (attributes) - *sattva* (transparence), *rajas* (activity) and *ramas* (inactivity). When *Prakriti* comes into contact with *Purusha* (the spirit), begins the creation in which the attributes do not become separated from each other but each tries to dominate the other. If *sattva* is predominant, *Prakriti* transforms itself into *Buddhi*, the cosmic knowledge, which is *Mahat* (great). The transformation of *Prakriti* is like pressing oil out of a seed. Out of *Mahat*, the next lower category *ahankara* (ego) and

from it the *manas* (mind) are born. Mind is the five sense organs.

Having explained the evolution of the mind, Kapila comments on the nature of human body. He says : Human body is just a gross object among gross objects, made of gross elements that issue out of the ego. Yet, it is a privileged object for the ego and is a special instrument for the enjoyment of other objects. And, of course, we have seen how man should view the special instrument of enjoyment. Saints have been telling us that these enjoyments are provided to us by the Supreme Lord for our comfort and that we should not covet them as our own. They do not belong to us, they are given us only temporarily. Therefore, everything we enjoy here, must be enjoyed with a sense of detachment. *Ishavasya Upanishad** stresses this significant point when it says : "All this, whatsoever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. You may enjoy these worldly enjoyments through renunciation. This wealth does not belong to you, therefore, do not ever covet what belongs to others".

The Buddha echoes similar lofty sentiments. He says : "The basis of all effort should be renunciation.' It cannot be learned; it must grow, like the dawn. When it is night, we can admire the millions of stars, but all their beauty and the glory of the moon fade with the first rays of the sun. Renunciation begins when one learns to distinguish between the value a thing has apart from one's desire." The value of a thing is regulated by one's desire for it; if one wants to know its real value, one must

give up one's desire for it, but then it will be seen at once that it has lost all value. One should be care-free but not careless. This freedom from care is the result of forgetting the self, the result of self-renunciation. When pleasures vanish of their own accord, they end in keen anguish of the mind; when relinquished by one's own will, they produce infinite happiness.

Buddhism points at the liberation of matter (body) from the self. The passions of the body must be subdued. Therefore, body becomes the eternal enemy of the spirit, to be overcome by prayer and austerities. That is why the Buddha condemns materialism as despicable, vulgar, ordinary, based and leading to no good. He says ; Increase of comfort leads only to desire for still more and that will always lead to conflict.

Saints tell us that the defilements that cloud wisdom (body and mind) are to be removed. Only then can man have the first taste of happiness which gives serene tranquility, a sense of equilibrium - 'not disturbed by likes and dislikes, nor made turbid by passions, nor hazed by ignorance - like sunlight that penetrates a placid lake of clear water'. That is the supreme insight. What has to be achieved, what has to be done, will have been accomplished then.

That is why saints tell us that whatever is to be achieved, can be achieved only in the human body. Whatever there is outside it is vulgar and defiled, foreign and distant. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad** says : This self is dearer than a son, dearer

*Tad etat preyah putrat, preyo vittat, preyo'nyasmat sarvasmat, antarataram, yad ayam atma. I : 4.8

than wealth, dearer than everything - because it is the nearest and innermost. That self, the soul, lives in our own body. The *self interest*, therefore, is supreme to man. This interest should be shown not in seeking fulfilment of worldly pleasures but in seeking fulfilment of the purpose of our coming into this world - that is, merging this self in the Universal Self.

The Christian saints say that the human body is a small universe, a reproduction of the Grand Universe. 'Man travel to gaze upon mountain heights and the waves of the sea, broad-flowing rivers and the expanse of the ocean, and pass by themselves, the crowning wonder', said St. Augustine in his *confessions*. Whatever true and permanent phenomenon there is, is preserved in the human body. Only one has to acquire the faculty to comprehend it. That is beyond the nine doors of the body and exists at the Tenth Door. St. Matthew says. 'Knock, and it shall be opened to you'. One has to know how to knock at the Tenth Door - to witness the glory of the self which is but a part of the Great and Universal Self. And St. Matthew suggests how one can acquire the knowledge to go inside one's body. He says: 'If, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.' That means, if one can cultivate how to look at that inner verity, one can fill his whole being with that Radiant Light of the Supreme Soul.

The Muslim saints conveyed to us similar message. The *Holy Quran* says: 'Before thy death, do thou die' and whoever dies before his death, gets relieved of a world of sorrow; whoever

flies out of the material world, gets delivered from the universe'. That means, whoever tries to recognise the self within the human body and controls all desires and passions and endeavours to reach his inner self will receive deliverance. In other words, whoever subdues or annihilates the attributes of physical life - and, through it, experiences death while living, will be lead into the Eternal Self.

Kabir also gives similar message. In his famous poems *Kar nainon deedar mehal mein Pyara hai*, he addresses his eyes to see the "Beloved inside". That is, that which is dear and near to us, is within our body. We must perceive that Reality by going inside. Guru Nanak reflects on this spiritual problem and gives us gems of spirituality. He says : "The Beloved resides within you, O ignorant man! And foolish are you to search for Him outside - in temples, churches, mosques and gurudwaras. Nor can you find Him in rivers or forests, scriptures or rituals. A true seeker has only to perceive Him within his own body" In the *Granth Sahib* it is said : 'The temple of God is the body, from which comes out the genuine rubies of knowledge, The Higher Worlds can be reached not by climbing mountains, but by withdrawing attention within ourselves and traversing upwards spiritually.'

That is why saints tell us that the essence of spirituality is the realisation of the self within oneself. Spirituality implies the giving up of narrow, selfish egocentredness and attainment of the Universal Self. It would take the form of complete identification with all beings. The good of one is the good of all. The seeker does not seclude or divide himself from others, nor is he divided in himself.

He is integrated. But material preoccupations give him the slight. He is blind-folded, he is unaware of the truth. And to overcome this weakness, he sets about to find the Reality in ceremonies, in rituals, in recitations and in vain and boastful learning.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad** there is an interesting dialogue between Sanatkumara and Narada. Narada approaches Sanatkumara and says : 'Sir, teach me.' Then the guru asks him to say what he had known, so that he would teach him what is beyond that, Narada says : 'I know the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajour Veda*, the *Sama Veda* and the *Atharvana* the fourth. And also, the *Itihasa - purana* as the fifth. I know the *Veda* of the *Vedas*, the rules for propitiations of the departed Elders, the science of numbers, the science of portents, the science of time, the sciences of logic, ethics and politics, the science of the gods, the science of scriptural studies, the science of elemental spirits, the science of weapons, the science of the stars, the science of snake-charming and the fine arts - all these, Sir, I know. But Sir, with all this I am only a knower of words, not a knower of the self. I have heard from holy men like you that he who knows the self crosses over sorrow. I am in sorrow. Do help me to cross-over to the other side of sorrow.'

To him, Sanatkumara says : 'Verily, whatever you have learnt here is only words. The scholarship that is acquired through the senses, has a beginning and an end. Absolute existence cannot be realised in the phenomenal world, in which one

experiences constant birth and death. Self is beyond all scholarship.'

The individual is finite, soul is infinite, their coming together produces the ensouled body - which is the individualisation of the infinite. Swami Vivekananda says : "You may invent an image through which to worship God, but a living image already exists - that is the living man, That is you. You may build a temple in which to worship God, but a better one, a much higher one already exists - that is the human body, the ensouled body, the individualised infinite."

Therefore, saints tell us that whoever cannot find the Infinite in his being, can never find the same in any temple. This body of ours is so sacred and through this body alone we can seek to realise the Truth and endeavour to put an end to the seemingly endless cycle of births and death. But, we wrongly think that God lives in the temples, we build for Him, with brick and mortar, and hold the buildings in great reverence. If any one tries to pollute it, we react sharply and enter into quarrels. But, a great pity, that the human body, the temple of the living God, the temple which the Lord Himself has made for His residence, is allowed to be polluted and defiled. We fill the human body with non-vegetarian food and toxic alcoholic drinks, with passion, greed, anger and lust. Saints tell us that we do not know how really blasphemous these acts of ours are and try to convince us that we must lead a life of purity, chastity and spirituality and endeavour to perceive the Lord in the temple he has made for himself.

We all live a life of illusion. We suffer from

the erroneous perception of a rope as a snake - out of fear; then of mirage in the desert as a water - fountain out of hope. Only a saint has the immediate knowledge directly without the help of any sense. Only such a realised soul can guide us out of the quagmire. We allowed ourselves to slip in. And the guidance a saint offers is the discipline, of concentration and its purpose is the isolation of the soul from the body through meditation. The object of this spiritual discipline is the progressive realisation of the Pure Self as distinct from the body - Body-Mind - I complex. The point to be reached, is a foundational, basic consciousness that is unconditional, self-evident and immediate - *Swayam Prakash*

Now, for this concentration of mind and meditation, we must prepare ourselves by cultivating a sense of detachment and renunciation which will afford us purity and spirituality. And saints will appear at the right and opportune time to give us a helping hand. They come all on their own, according to their own will, because their mission is to come down to this earth whenever mankind needs divine intervention.

In the Book of Mirdad it is said - "I come when I will, and I go when I will. I come to free the tenants of the earth from bondage to the earth." That is the will and pleasure of divine souls. They teach us to remember that the key to eternal life is the Word, and the key to the Word is Love. The key to Love is understanding. Mirdad says: "You need no lip or tongue for praying, but silent and wakeful heart, a Master-Wish, a Master-Thought and above all, a Master-

Will. Love is the only freedom from wordly attachment: when you love everything you are attached to nothing." Otherwise, you are left in the whirlpool. When you pass out of the cycle known as life into the cycle known as death, you carry with you thirsts unquenched for the earth and hungers unappeased for its passions, then will the magnet of the earth draw you again to her bosom. And the earth shall suckle you.

That is why the sadguru tells us that we should live a life free from passions, desires and greed. The human life which God has given us so that we endeavour and cut the bond of birth and death in this very life and reach the Supreme Lord, should be devoted to the love of God, to the worship of God. The ancient system of loving God and worshipping Him is through the blessing of *Nama* by a Sadguru and meditating on the *Nama* with mind drawn at the eye-centre. And once we meditate on the *Shabda*, the Sadguru, who has initiated us into the system and who is the very embodiment of that Divine Melody, meets us at the eye-centres and leads us upwards to our original abode.

The human body is a sacred asset given us with the sole object of realising the Supreme Lord who resides within this human temple. We should endeavour to cleanse and purify our bodies of all afflictions and imperfections and live within the will of the Sadguru who will lead us from the unreal to the Real from darkness to Light and from death to Deathlessness.

THE PERFECT MASTER

SAINTS tell us that in the matter of development of mystic faculties one should seek the guidance of an adept, a living spiritual teacher, just as we approach a qualified teacher to learn any subject. In *Sant Mat*, religion of the saints, the spiritual guide is known as *Sant Sadguru*. The English word 'saint' may only partly express the connotation. *Sadguru* means True Guru or True Religious Preceptor. And *Sant Sadguru* is a great and divine guide who has highly developed spiritual powers. A person possessing mere theoretical knowledge of spirituality or scholarship about the various stages of spiritual journey cannot be called *Sant Sadguru*. Only a person who either has by means of devotional and spiritual practices, fully developed his spiritual faculties and realised the Supreme Being-or-himself being part of the Supreme possessed this high status from His birth.

After a man becomes aware of the vast expanse of creation, its innumerable spheres, its infinite spirit entities, the grandeur of the universe, the glory of the Supreme Master, comes the realisation of his utter helplessness. He begins to think: "How infinitesimal and insignificant am I and how trifling and useless is my capacity!" As compared with the whole creation, this region of *Pinda* is not equal even to a mustard seed; in relation to all the animate beings inhabiting the earth, human beings are not

even a handful And he is but one amongst these insignificant human beings-imprisoned in a cage of bones, flesh and skin, held fast to the earth, pressed down by the weight of the atmosphere, bound down by the laws of nature, a slave of desires, as weak as a bird without wings and feathers, relying only upon the very limited faculties of sight, smell, hearing etc. and "depending on the intellect confined to the limits of three dimensions!"

With such intellect and such capacity what can a man possibly do? The utmost he can do is to wrap himself up in a sheet of cloth and lie down quietly in some unknown corner. How miserable is his plight! He will never be able to overcome the forces which are keeping him tied down to this earth; he will never get any knowledge of things beyond the range of his very limited faculties In bondage he is born, in bondage he has been brought up and in bondage will he die That marks the exit from one of the innumerable births

Is there any end to it? Can man seek to put an end to the cycle of births and deaths? Can man seek deliverance from ignorance and suffering? And through it can he attain to the Real, True, Eternal and Supreme Self? *Sant Mat* has a message of cheer to such a disheartened and despondent man The path of the saints which is as old as man himself, has been forgotten The saints tell us that, after all, we are not so insignificant or unfortunate They comfort us by telling the truth behind the whole creation. They say that we are a particle of the essence of that very Supreme Being. Our capacity and our ability are unlimited. These bones and this flesh are just a covering; these are not our essence.

We are not tied down to this world for eternity, provided we have the will to cut the bond. The bird without wings and feathers is different, our real self is the reality. Our real self is *Sat*, all-energy; *Chit*, all-intelligence; *Ananda*, all-bliss; and *Prema*, all-love.

Our knowledge can be unlimited as our bliss can be so too. Neither the moon nor the sun, nor even the *Pinda* and the *Brahmanda* can be greater and more significant than our Real Self. We are a ray from the glorious, resplendent Supreme Personality—just as the attributes of the ray are the attributes of the sun, the glory of the individual self is resplendent as the Supreme Self. But we are unaware of the essence of the real self. And the awareness can come only when we close our eyes, nose and ears and other “doors” and open our internal eye, we can behold our powers and the splendour of our Supreme Father’s omnipotence and omnipresence.

A very joyous message this, indeed. Our despondent heart feels so much comforted with these happy tidings. But after a moment’s reflection, we come face to face with reality and each begins to feel: Can I really open my internal eye through my own efforts? Can I progress in this direction by my own efforts? Am I capable of keeping my eyes, nose and ears really closed? Can I do this on my own unaided and without any guidance?

There can be only one answer to this and that is *No*. But God is so gracious that He does not leave any scope for despair. He has already laid out the course for us; He has made all necessary arrangements for us for admission into the higher

spiritual regions. He has ordained that Great Souls be born into this world in a human form and draw our attention to the futility and impermanence of wordly things and convince us to endeavour to shed this-worldliness and cultivate love for the divinity that belongs to the Higher World. These Great Souls are incarnations of God Himself-and here lies the eternal principle of divine intervention at a time when mankind falls on evil ways and the situation warrants that evil be corrected and good be rewarded. The *Gita* and many other spiritual texts echo this message. The reward is securing admission into the August Presence of the Supreme Being

Saints tell us that spiritual guidance for man is available through only a living Perfect Master, *Sant Sadguru*. The Sant Sadguru is the Lord incarnate whose power reverberates in the form of Divine Melody within each human being. Saint Eknath says that the Sadguru is the Indwelling Divine that has assumed a human form for the benefit of the people who yearn for a living, visible spiritual guide. The Sadguru associates himself with the life of the common man and lives as one of them.

But the greatest difficulty of a seeker is how to recognise a *Sant Sadguru* when he lives as one of us and amidst us? We are so much preoccupied with the worldly affairs, living a life of pleasure and enjoyment. We cannot for a moment realise that the object of saints is to teach the essence of spirituality, the eternal truth, and to guide men in their spiritual pursuit; we cannot convince ourselves that the saints are selfless, patient and charitable. Because, in our daily life we come across so many

people claiming to be *sadhus* luring simple folks into snares. Such *sadhus* cannot lead us along the spiritual path because they are themselves not familiar with the celestial path. They covet worldly things and try to impersonate a Sadguru only for the satisfaction of their personal desires.

There are gurus and gurus. There is an interesting story: Once a guru came to a village. The villagers were happy to receive the guru whom they believed to be a godman. And according to the tradition, each day, a householder invited the guru to his place to accept the *bhuksha*, the offering of food, by turns. One day, after the guru had had his sumptuous and wholesome meal and was relaxing, a villager stood up and addressed the guru in all sincerity and humility. "Swamiji, we are so indebted to you that you condescended to visit this humble village and give us the benefit of your presence. Now, will you kindly take the *Gita*?" The guru, verily an imposter and an ignoramus, never heard of the *Gita*. As the villagers were feeding him with all kinds of food day in and day out, he thought that *Gita* too was a kind of sweetmeat, and said: "I am pleased with your devotion. But, you know, I have just had my food. I cannot take *Gita* now. My belly is full. You may offer that a little later!"

A Sadguru, on the other hand, remains absorbed in the love of the Lord, selfless love of the human beings and is always indifferent to the world. He discharges the functions of a spiritual guide merely as service to the Lord. Saint Namadev describes the qualities of a True Guru: "You can know a saint by his indifference to worldly life, his perennial love, his incessant remembrance of God's name,

his humanity, his constant divine contemplation, his effacement of egoism, his disregard of money, his absence of sensuousness and anger, his peace and forgiveness, his equality, his indifference to pleasure and pain and his eagerness to show men the path of devotion.”

Guru alone can initiate us into the mystery of spiritual experience. Saints have equated the name of God with the Sadguru, he says, they equated the name of Sadguru with God Himself* — because the Sadguru endows the devotee with the powerful medium of the *Nama* which symbolises and epitomises God and which is the surest means to God-realisation.

The Buddhists believe that in the kindling of spiritual life and the way to the highest attainment, the guidance of God is necessary. As there are several possibilities and innumerable ways man cannot rely on his unaided reason. He might go astray if he has to seek the eternal on his own, which calls for a God-sent or God-inspired spiritual guide. And man can receive the benefit of spiritual guidance only if he removes ignorance and cultivates renunciation through overcoming desires and passions. In Buddhism, salvation is described as ‘freedom from moral evil’; spiritual discipline is acquired through the kindness of a Perfect Master, a *Buddha*, an enlightened one. This self-discipline is the path of purification—*Vishuddhi marga*.

According to the Christian faith, God becomes man, so that man may become God. And whenever

* Guru Parmesaru eko janu

Jo tisu bhavaï so Paravanu—Gaud. M. 5 864
(Granth Sahib)

God sends His son to save mankind, He desires that the Perfect Law of Heaven be established on the earth. Thus, it is said· ‘The Law of Heaven is Perfect and the Law of Man is Perfection’ Human beings are like sheep--with no intelligence, with no sense of direction, and the Person who comes into this world to give men intelligence and a clear direction in life, thus becomes a shepherd. It is an indication of the intense love God has for mankind, that He gave His only begotten son to be a shepherd unto all men. He came down into this world and said· “I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day.” The works of God that Jesus is sent to work are, filling human hearts with love for one another, kindling love for God with a view to merging back into Him. Although He is the Son of God who is sent here on a spiritual mission, Jesus lives a life of humility, a life of simplicity. We recall the beautiful poem from the *Book of Mirdad* which sings of the true qualities of a God-sent man:

The truly high is ever low
The truly swift is ever slow
The highly sensitive is ever numb
The highly eloquent is ever dumb.

It is a divine law that God manifests Himself as man--full of virtue--so that we may learn and emulate his example. St. Bernard says: “The chief reason which prompts the invisible God to become visible in flesh and to hold converse with men is to lead carnal men--who are only able to love carnally, to the healthful love of his flesh--little by little to spiritual love.”

Confucius says: “Sincerity is the way of Heaven;

the attainment of sincerity is the way of men." Sincerity is that whereby self-completion, self-perfection is achieved. It is only he "possessed of all sagely qualities that can show men the way to attainment of self-completion, the way to attainment of self-perfection." He is a Perfect Master.

And Confucius describes the Perfect Master's qualities: "He who shows himself quick in apprehension, clear in discernment, of far-reaching knowledge, of all-embracing knowledge, magnanimous, generous, benign, and mild, energetic, enduring, fitted to command reverence, distinctive, concentrative and ever-searching." Therefore, "His fame," as Confucius puts it, "spreads and extends to all corners. Wherever ships and carriages reach, wherever the strength of man penetrates, wherever the heavens overshadow and the earth sustains, wherever the sun and moon shine, wherever frosts and dews fall--all who have blood and breath unfeignedly honour and love such a man of Perfect Virtue. Hence, he is the equal of Heaven." He is the Perfect Master.

And singing the glory of such a Perfect Master, Confucius exclaims: "Call him man in his ideal, how earnest is he! Call him an abyss, how deep is he! Call him Heaven, how vast is he!"

How can we know such a Great Soul? He does not display his virtues. He does not show off. He dislikes the thought of his name being mentioned in superlative terms. Now, when it is difficult for us even to recognise the Virtuous Guide, it is beyond us to think that we would obey him and follow the Path shown by him. And God is aware of this too. The Perfect Master reveals Himself in unmistakable

terms because He is eager to fulfil His mission--of drawing unto Him all the marked souls for delivery at the abode of the Lord. He reveals Himself through compassion because he is keenly concerned about the suffering of humanity. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the purpose of incarnation is expressly stated to be saving the man, the uplift of humanity. So the Perfect Master has His own ways of drawing people to Him, of blessing them with the spiritual guidance, as without this no illumination or salvation of man is possible. And once He draws a man toward Him, His very contact proves awakening. The *Bhagavata Purana* says: "Sadhus save man the moment their eyes fall on one." There are different analogies given to illustrate the different ways in which the Perfect Masters bless--the bee which goes on stinging a worm and turns it into a bee like itself; the fish which impregnates with a mere look and so on. The Tamil saint Tayumanavar compares the Sadguru--who is a Man of realisation amidst us--to a ripe plantain fruit in a cluster of plantains; the very contiguity of the ripe plantain fruit causes the ripening of the unripe ones.

According to *Sant Mat*, Sadguru and the Supreme Being are one; the Self of the both is one integrated Self. There is no distinction between the Perfect Master and God. This is in line with the ancient Indian principle:

Gururbrahma Gururvishnuh Gururdevo

Maheshwarah

*Gurussakshat Parambrahma tasmai Shri
Guravenamah*

The Sadguru is identified with the divine principles of creation, sustenance, and dissolution---

Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara and adds that "Verily, the Guru is the Para Brahma, the Brahma that is beyond the entire creation--the embodiment of the eternal principle" Therefore, Kabir says: O Master, God of gods and Lord Supreme, grant me the gift of true and real devotion. You are all mercy in human form; only you can steer me safe across this fearful ocean.

Now even to acquire learning about a material science, we need a tutor. There may be any number of books on the subject, but we need the guidance of some one who has assimilated all scholarship on that subject. The tutor knows what points to be clarified and elaborated for an easy understanding of the subject by the student. Thus, when we require the assistance of a living teacher, physically present master, for the comprehension of a material science, it is a great imperative that seekers of spiritual understanding do need a guide who is thorough with the path of spiritual journey. Even in this case, past Masters who had realised the Supreme Self and become one with Him, had written down their experiences, had suggested ways and means of attaining to the Higher Spiritual regions. But we do need a Master with whom we can talk, can seek guidance and who can hold us by our finger-like a father does with his little young son-and lead us to where he came from, to where we all belong. It is, therefore, our duty to love him and worship him and surrender to him both our mind and our body, to please him into revealing the mystery of the Supreme Master.

Kabir pleads inability to sing the entire glory of the Perfect Master. He says: "When you

surrender all your inner consciousness, all outer forms will vanish from your sight and you will see nothing but the Master everywhere. Such is the greatness of a Perfect Master, that if the world were turned to paper, all the forests into writing pens, and all the seven oceans into ink, they can not adequately describe His glory. They are blind, indeed, who think that the Master is simply a human being." And Kabir gives us a very comforting word. "If you remember the Lord, salvation seems to be far far away. But if you love the Master and worship him, in a moment you will be transported across the three worlds to the higher regions."

Guru Nanak says that there is no greater giver, benefactor than the Guru. He* gives the great gift of Shabda. That is, he links our soul current with the eternal Shabda, the divine melody which reverberates within each one of us day and night. The Master does this by initiating us into the mystery of *Nama* and giving us concentration of mind at the eye-center. When a disciple sits in meditation repeating the holy names contemplating on the Sadguru, the Master arrives in His radiant form and leads him upwards till he reaches the Nameless Region. That is why saints tell us that the Master is the only Giver. When the Sadguru is pleased with the devotee and bestows upon him the gift of the Holy Name, the seed is sown; it is then left to the devotee to treasure it, to foster it,

*Bin gur datae koi na pae

Lakh koti je karm kamae—Maru. M 3. 1057

(Granth Sahib)

to develop it within his heart and realise the Name within himself.

Through continuous repetition of the holy names of the Lord, the devotee will be able, by degrees, to obtain more and more internal purification, which enables the Sadguru to give the seeker further strength for spiritual progress. It is said that devotion to the Guru is giving our love to him and that when settles deep in the heart, it gets consummated. This supreme love for the Master is the only qualification for admission into the Holy Presence. Saint Paltu says : *Sahib ke darbar me keval bhakti, pyar*, in the court of the Supreme Lord only love and devotion are taken note of. Because, when true love for the Master is generated, the devotee will be free from the wordly ties and will rise closer and closer to Him internally. It is only then that the devotee will begin to comprehend the spiritual eminence of his Sadguru. Then, his heart will pourforth unuttered prayer :

Dhan Satguru dhan unki Sangat

Jis pratap payi main yeh gat

Blessed is the Sadguru, blessed is his company, by whose grace I have attained this blissful state.

That state marks the fulfilment of the devotee's cherished ideal; that state marks the resplendent manifestation within of the Perfect Master; that state marks the beginning of an endless association of the self and the Supreme Self in the higher spiritual regions. Guru Nanak also says : "In Sadguru has the Lord put Himself, and by manifesting Himself in the Sadguru, he reveals Himself." The human garb of the Sadguru is only to enable us to come in contact with Him, to go

within our body to find the Lord.

Since time immemorial this has been the ordained tradition; without the kindly guidance of a living Master, nobody has ever gone inside one's body and realised the Supreme Soul. Lord Rama, though an incarnation of the Almighty, had to seek spiritual guidance from Vashishtha and Vishwamitra; Lord Krishna, another incarnation of the Supreme Force, never interfered with the eternal principle and accepted Garg as his spiritual teacher, Saint Shuka had to go to king Janaka seeking guidance although he had attained enlightenment even before he came out of his mother's womb. Maulana Rumi had his spiritual guidance from Shams-i-Tabrez; Swami Vivekananda from Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This shows that in matters spiritual all people had and have to seek guidance from a living perfect Master. That is the ancient inviolable system. We must seek guidance from a living *Sant Sadguru* because, just as we cannot enter unaided a dark, unlit room, we cannot enter our consciousness inside our body as long as it is dark. Only when we are able to light up the chamber inside with a spiritual lamp to be lighted only by a Sadguru, we can enter and traverse upwards inside. "The switch of the lamp is in the hands of the Master."

The Sadguru has the key to spiritual understanding. We know that interesting story Maharaj Charan Singh narrates to show how very significant is the key saints carry with them to release us from the bonds of the world. Once, a charitably disposed person went to a prison-house. He pitied the plight of the prisoners in the hot summer

climate and arranged that cold water be supplied to the inmates. The prisoners were happy to have cold drinking water. Later, another kindly person was moved to tears at the plight of the prisoners who had no warm clothes in winter. So, he spent a lot of money and supplied woollen garments to the prisoners. They were immensely happy and spent their time in warm comfort. After some time, another good samaritan who felt sorry for the uneatable food being supplied to the prisoners, made elaborate arrangements at great cost to serve good and wholesome food to the prisoners. The inmates jumped with joy eating the good food served to them. Now, came a saintly soul who felt pity for the prisoners. With all the cold water supply in summer, warm clothing in winter and delicious food on all days, they continued to be prisoners, robbed of freedom and liberty. So, he brought the key and threw open the gates and set the prisoners free. Now, we can know which of the kind deeds was really significant in terms of the purpose of human birth. Therefore, saints come into this world with the key to release us from the bondages of the world.

Maharaj Sawan Singh drives home the point that unless saints turn the key, nothing can move, nothing can travel. The human body, he says, is a unique machine, a wonderful vehicle and unless saints turn the key inside our body, the sound current within us is not manifested to us. Just as a trained pilot can lift the aircraft into the skies with ease, fly wherever one wants to and bring it back to the hangar safely, the Sadguru who knows not only the vehicle but also the path, can

start the machine, take it up and land easily. Therefore, saints tell us that we need, for our spiritual journey inside the body, a Sadguru who is a Master Pilot and who has been going up every day on solo flights and bringing the machine back safely. The Master Pilot has been appointed by the owner of the aircraft himself. In this case, the Master Pilot owns the plane himself because plane and the pilot are not two different entities-also, the pilot, the plane and human cargo are but one. Thus, God and Guru are one; God and his creation are also one. Therefore, the devotee and the Guru are one. Only the realisation of this unity is to be effected. And only to give us the confidence that we can realise that truth, God takes human birth in the form of a Sadguru. It is essential that we sit with him, talk to him, love him, worship him and please him with our sincerity of desire to go with him back to the Supreme Father.

As we have seen, the meaning of the expression Sadguru is—*Sat* is True *gu* is darkness, and *ru* is light. That means He is that person who can lead us from darkness to Light, from unreal to the Real from death to Immortality.

THE WORD IS THE VEHICLE

NAMA means name; the name we give to the Almighty, the supreme being. All *namas* are God's names but all names are not *namas*. However, God is *Anami*, nameless; He is the ultimate source of all existence. As man could not comprehend the nature of the Supreme Being, he tried to fancy His essence and began describing Him in a variety of ways. The Hindus gave him a hundred and eight names and later, tried to address Him by a thousand names. In *Jap Sahib*, Guru Govind Singh mentioned hundreds of names of God. In all world religions, saints addressed Him variously. And this is simply for the benefit of the common man. They know that God has no form - *Arupi* and no name - *Anami*.

Swamiji Maharaj discusses this in His *Sar Bachan* for the guidance of seekers. He says that there are two kinds of names - the uttered and the unuttered - *varnatmak* and *dhunatmak*. That name which can be uttered, written or read physically is *varnatmak nama*. Each saint has given a number of names for God so that man may try to comprehend His omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence.

According to Kabir there are four Ramas in this universe—

*Jag me charon Ram hain, teen Ram vyavahar
Chautha Ram nij saar hai, tin ka karo vichar*

*Ek Ram Dasharath ghar dole, ek Ram ghat ghat
me bole*

*Ek Ram ka sakal pasara, ek Ram sab hoon se
nyara.*

There are four Ramas and three are known; the fourth is the Essence of all beings. One Rama was the son of Dasharatha of *tretayuga*, the silver age. He had come and gone. The other Rama is the mind which spreads itself over the sprawling universe; wanders everywhere and always in a wavering state--never contented, never at peace with the world. The third Rama is the Brahma who is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. And finally, the Rama who is the manifestation of the Divine sound, *Omkara* or *Pranava Nada* which cannot be adequately described. The *dhunatmak nama* refers only to the fourth Rama who, in Kabirs' words, is beyond words and can only be experienced within. That Divine Sound could be heard only internally.

The *varnatmak nama*, the uttered name is an important pre-requisite to feast our spiritual ears on the *Divine Shabda*. There are ever so many attributive names for God. But whatever a Perfect Master asks us to repeat shall be good because through the repetition of that Name we will be able to open the Tenth Door and listen to that Divine Melody. The *varnatmak nama* is only a means to an end and not an end in itself. It helps us only to cleanse our mind and concentrate at the eye-centre where the Perfect Master meets us in His astral form and takes us along so that we can hear the *dhunatmak nama*.

It is in this connection, saints tell us of the

futility of merely parroting the names of God; the purposelessness of vainly repeating the various names of God. Some people count the beads of the rosary in a mechanical way without any attempt to concentrate the mind at the Third Eye. Some people repeat God's name by writing it down a million times and feel contented by filling a fat book with His name without bothering to repeat it with concentrated attention. Some people offer worship by reciting or by singing the million or billion names of God in a matter of fact manner as if it is a formality. They may be able to impress the onlookers and simpletons with their demonstrative devotion but cannot dupe themselves, far from duping God. God has never been approached through ostentatious means, through showy worship or through telling the whole world that they are devoted worshippers of the Almighty. Whoever understood God, whoever comprehended God, whoever reached God and whoever listened to the *Divine Shabda* has done so only through simplicity and humility. Physical prowess, material might and worldly accomplishments cannot take one towards the Beloved God. He can be attained only through loving, concentrated repetition of His name.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says that devotees should repeat the Holy Names of the Lord with love and devotion as if one calls out for his beloved, as if one addresses his darling. He also disapproves the idea of repeating the Names in a great hurry because it makes the repetition a formal affair and renders it an exercise in futility. The *dhun* or the melody, can be comprehended

only through sustained concentrated *sumiran*. And once seekers are able to comprehend that divine name, the *dhunatmak nama*, they have no use for the *varnatmak nama* and, therefore, to be discarded. People use a vehicle to reach their destination and after reaching it, nobody continues to sit in the vehicle but steps out. Our purpose is not just to use a car for its sake but to reach a place and after reaching that place, we have no use for the car. Similarly, by using the vehicle of *varnatmak nama* we reach a stage or the region where we can hear the *dhunatmak nama*

If we set out in a vehicle to attend a music recital in a concert hall, we must get out of the vehicle and enter the theatre in order to feast our ears on music. Just by reaching the concert hall, we cannot hear music. The Buddha says similarly. In the *Vajrachhedika Sutra*, talking to Subhuti, he says : 'The physical attributes are to be rejected later just as men leave the boat after crossing the stream.' Saints tell us that the stream has been created by God and, the boat by which we cross the stream has also been created by Him because God desires that the marked souls should come back to Him. The boat or the vehicle has been made so beautifully and temptingly that we tend to fall in love with the vehicle. But, again, God Himself comes to our rescue, He manifests Himself as Perfect Master, from time to time, and diverts our attention away from the physical beauties and allurements of the attributes towards the Real and the Permanent, towards the eternal and ever-re-verberating Melody.

The repetition of Holy Names is like fixing

wings on persons; using the wings people have to fly into the world of spirituality, into the realms of *Divine Shabda*. And once we reach that spiritual region, we have no use for the wings. But, to acquire the wings one must condition his mind, one must make it behave according to the will of the Master. One must prepare himself to accept His grace. In this preparation lies the first lesson of Sant Mat, mysticism of saints. By listening to this lesson, by grasping its nature, by trying to understand its essence and by trying and succeeding to live within the Master's word, we can please saints. The *Bhagavad Gita* says : *Na kinchidapi chintayet*, we should not think of anything else other than God's word and if we keep repeating the Holy Name granted by the Master, we can attain God. In the *Gita* the Lord says . *Smaranamatra santushtaya* - God is pleased by our remembering Him, our repeating His *nama*. And through His pleasure, we get to experience the divine sweetness of the *nama*. Then everything else tastes insipid, even bitter. Hanuman, the devoted disciple of Shri Rama, experienced the sweetness of the divine *nama*. He reached that state through years of devoted, dedicated *sumiran* of *Rama nama*. There is a story in the *Ramcharit Manas*. At the bidding of Shri Rama, Hanuman flew to Lanka and carried a message to Sita. Sita was pleased to hear of the welfare of her Lord and as a token of her appreciation of Hanuman's service, she presented him with a pearl necklace. Hanuman removed a pearl from the necklace, put it in his mouth and crunched it. It tasted lime and pungent, he spat it out and

said : 'I prefer the sweetness of my Lord's name.' And returned the necklace to Sita with thanks. When we come to experience that divine sweetness of *Shabda*, everything else tastes so insipid.

Saint Namdev declares that there is no other means than that of the *nama* granted by a Sadguru, to reach God. He deprecates all other means as futile and suggests that in order to remove the bonds of existence *nama* is the only rescue. *Nama Smarana* is the only means to removing worldly grief. It induces introspection and the consequent discrimination gives the essential knowledge for spiritual progress. And Namdev says that the repetition of God's name removes all identity of *you* and *me* and makes for a detached mind; but the repetition must not be verbal or mechanical but mental with all concentration, all the time and without any desire.

The earth, the sky and all the created things have been created by the power of *nama* and *nama* is the supporter of everything. Wherever *nama* is, everything else is. The Sadguru says : Through *nama*, one develops a constant inner attachment to the sound of the *Shabda dhun*. Our love and longing for *Shabda* should always be like a rankling pain. The more we love our Sadguru, the more will be our longing for *Shabda*. If one listens to *Shabda* lovingly every day, all the afflictions of the mind will be cured ; all the worldly attachments will be snapped.

The repetition of *Nama* can be done only in human life. Because, a Sadguru in human form bestows the boon of *nama* on a living human devotee. Therefore, only in human body can one unite with

God, provided one gets the complete initiation and complete secret of the journey from a Perfect Master. If a devotee has received the initiation, he has received everything; he has received all the secrets of the spiritual journey.

Saint Jnanadeva describes what is initiation 'It is a process of transmission of the highly charged Energy of Being from the Sadguru to the disciple. It is placing of what is in Guru's heart into the heart of the disciple. It is the swallowing of an egocentric entity of the one by the egoless other.' It is a process of total transformation of the evolution-bound man, through culture, into a free authentic human being, in whom the entire evolution becomes aware of itself. Initiation means 'the awakening of the slumbering energy of life present in every human being which becomes a light unto itself.' It signifies the liquidation of all egocentric desires and motivations, and the ideation they trigger, alongwith the total emptying of the mind of all the accumulated refuge of the animal and social heritage. It signifies 'the negation of the conceptual 'I' or the ego, making it an existential anonymity and a non-entity.' It signifies the death of the conditioned psyche and the birth of a new, freely seeing awareness, looking at itself and its abode - the world. It signifies freedom from the past and the emergence of a self-illuminated awareness, disclosing to oneself one's real, existential identity in a timeless dimension.

Initiation, therefore, is verily a rebirth in which man, becomes man, full man, a complete man. Initiation is thus a process which helps man to rediscover his own identity

in terms of existential reality. One established in his own identity, walks in eternal wakefulness in the constant guidance of the spiritual mentor. The preceptor will never allow His disciple, to slip into the abyss again. He cheers the disciple, gives all the courage, all the strength and all the knowledge he requires for the spiritual journey. Through initiation, a man caught up in the bondages of animality and social conformity will be able to wake up, walk out of the prison-house of all bondages and wander in the high realms of spirituality.'

The disciple's *karmic* load is taken away by the Sadguru once a man is initiated. That is why saints pay the price for being kind to sinners. We know of so many instances in which the Sadguru had to suffer for the *karmic* debts of the initiated.

People may think that saints lead an easy, care-free life, they have thousands of followers and so on. But, saints' duty is the most difficult. They carry a heavier responsibility than the captain of a ship caught in a storm. This sea has a bottom and shores, but compare it with the sea of existence through which saints guide the soul and make it one with the Supreme Being who is manifested in the Divine Melody which can be listened to only through constant repetition of *nama*. Initiation marks one's entry into the spiritual realm of the Sadguru. *Sumiran* and *dhyana* which follow initiation is practical religion. As Max Muller says: 'Practical religion is a new life, a life in the sight of God and springs from what may be truly called a new birth.'

Maharaj Sawan Singh explains the dynamics of initiation in practical terms: *Nama* and *kama* are two terms used in our literature. *Nama* means Word or Sound Current, and *kama* generally means lust or passion or indulgence in sensual pleasures as opposed to self-control. But in a wider sense, it means, all out-ward tendencies of the mind. *Nama* and *kama* are, therefore, opposed to each other. The tendency of *Nama* is towards the inlet pipe to a reservoir, and *kama* leads to the outlet pipe. The reservoir may be filled if the inlet pipe is large and the outlet pipe is small. But it cannot remain filled if the outlet is wide open or even leaking. And the sooner the outlet is stopped, the faster the reservoir will be filled. The physical body is the reservoir. So long as the attention is at the eye-focus, it is filling, but when the attention is running below the focus, eye-focus, it is leaking. And the lower the attention below the focus the faster it is leaking. The sensual center is located very low; therefore, playing of the attention on this center causes enormous leakage, and there is a considerable amount of dissipation of energy. Nobody feels happier after the dissipation of energy. Nobody feels happier after the act of dissipation. That act is a happy act which leaves you happier.

Kabir compares *kama* and *Nama* to day and night respectively. Day and night do not go together. One is bright, luminous and the other is dark, dull. If there is day, there can be no night. If there is night, there is no day. If the attention is on *Nama*, there is no *kama*; if we give ourselves to *kama* there can be no *Nama*.

The law admits of no exceptions. The longing for *nama* means turning your back on *kama*. Turning your face to one means, turning your back to the other. Saints find human nature weak. They work to make it strong, step by step. They attach the individual to *nama* and, slowly and gradually, as longing for *nama* develops, the *karmic* tendencies diminish.

The world is the design of *Kal* and *Maya*, the negative forces. To keep the soul down, they based the structure of the world on couples—man and woman. If both were to catch the sound of *nama* and rise up, both would be free. Here, one holds down the other. And because we have not seen the other side of the picture, we take our present existence and our surroundings as the normal affair. Strictly speaking, the Sadguru says, ‘we are living an abnormal life. Soul, the queen of royal blood, enjoying the company of servants and sweepers is an abnormality.’ Therefore, by holding the attention at the eye focus, we are to fill the *pinda* reservoir. By holding it at *Trikuti*, we are to fill the *anda* reservoir. And by holding it at *Sach Khand*, we are to fill the *Brahmanda* reservoir. If leakage is allowed, filling gets delayed-perhaps, the filling may never even be up to the *pinda* level.

The Sadguru sounds a warning: ‘to rise up is a slow process, but to fall from a height is sudden.’ *Kama* is a sudden fall of attention. He emphasizes the grandeur of *nama* and brings it again and again to those who come in contact. He advocates looking up, while the world looks down. Whenever *nama* will become tasteful, *kama* will totally disappear. There is no other way of controlling *kama*.

Rising the focus of attention, automatically subdues *kama*.

Saints have to deal with human nature. If they ask a person to leave *kama* at once, before initiation, he cannot do so. Therefore, they attach him to *nama*. There is something for him to look up to now. A tiny spark is kindled in him. He gives it some attention. The days are passing. Partly through receiving knocks-sickness, death in the family, economic difficulties, shocks etc, partly through age, partly through *satsang*; partly because he has passed through some of his *pralabdha karma*, partly through devotion to *nama*, his attention is slowly contracting. By the time he reaches the end of his days, he is almost ready to go up and merge in the Creative Power.

No, if a man had made *nama* the main object of his life and had treated the world and worldly affairs as secondary, there is no reason why he should not have gone inside the eye-focus and risen up.

Maharaj Sawan Singh says that the aim of of spiritual practice is firstly and primarily to make the mind still and motionless so that no thought of any kind may disturb it while it is listening to the *Shabda dhun*. As the vibrations of the mind are made quiet, the Sound Current will of itself become clearer and clearer without any need of putting pressure on the eyes, ears or brain. And for stilling the vibrations of the mind, all that is necessary is to repeat the Holy Name with care and attention, with love and devotion, so that the mind does not wander. If it wanders during repetition, a second link should be applied to it by concentrating on

the form of the Sadguru who is the embodiment of *Shabda*.

When the mind begins to accept control and discipline and becomes motionless, one can see within oneself the effulgence of the spiritual world which will lead one to the stars, moon and the sun-which are all within this human body-and after them, to the Lotus Feet of the Master. When one reaches that stage, the Master will speak just as one converses with the people around in this world.

Nama has been accepted by all the religious teachers as the most powerful means to seek salvation. Jesus Christ called it the Word, Logos, Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost, Water of Life, Bread of Life, My Flesh etc. The Hindu and Sikh saints referred to it as *Rama Nama*, *Omkara*, *Pranava Nada*, *Anahad Shabd*, *Akasha Vani* etc. Muslim saints described it as *Bang-e-Asmani*, *Qalam-e-Ilahi*, and *Nad-e-Sultani*

Every religion acknowledges that it is the Word which created the universe and that by grasping the Word we acquire love for the Creator. Through love of Sadguru, we acquire the Word and through repetition of *nama* we experience the sweetness of *Shabda*. And through the experience of *Shabda*, we merge in the Lord.

THE COMPANY OF SAINTS

IN the path of mysticism three things are needed for self-realisation: *Satsang*, *Sadguru* and *Satnam*. The first and the most basic need is *satsang*. Through *satsang* we try to learn the immense power, illimitable grace, unbounded mercy of the Sadguru. Through worship of the spiritual preceptor and through offering ourselves in love and devotion to Him, we become eligible to receive *Satnam*, the mystic sound.

His kindness is manifested in the grant of the *nama* to us. *Nama* is the only means for us to shatter the bonds of worldly existence, the only instrument for us to put an end to the seemingly unending cycle of births and deaths, the only vehicle for us to traverse from death to immortality. Therefore, saints impress on us that by attending *satsangs*, we achieve the Sadguru and through the Sadguru we attain the *Satnam*.

Let us see what is *satsang*. *Sat* is true and *Sang* company or association. And *satsang* means company or association with that which is true. That is, company of Truth. And saints tell us, in this Universe only Shabda is true, eternal, unending and permanent. Our endeavour should be to realize that Celestial Sound and merge in that all pervading Melody.

Satsang is two fold-external and internal. External *satsang* is a great aid to internal *satsang* and

similarly, internal *satsang* prompts and encourages a devotee to attend external *satsang*. One depends on the other; one draws sustenance from the other. But, in essence, the internal *satsang* alone is the most efficacious vehicle to lead us to our cherished goal.

External *satsang* is keeping the company of *Sant Sadguru*. Now, this is suggested to a devotee as a *must* because it pre-supposes a certain state of mind on the part of the seeker. He should live an honest life, a pure life and earn the love of the Master into allowing us in His presence. No man with crooked ideas or evil thoughts would ever think of the company of saints. As already stated, in Indian ethics, there are two aspect explained : one is *priya* that which pleases us to hear. The other is *hita* that which is good for us but may not please us. The Sadguru asks us to shun worldly pleasures because they are not permanent, to shun evil ways of life because they perpetrate our *karmic* load, to shun egoistic and proud thoughts because they blur our view of things. The saints tell us that *hita* is good for us.

But it is common knowledge, we do not accept anything that which does not please us. If people say some flattering words to us, we are so pleased. If people praise our intelligence, our scholarship, our erudition, it sounds so pleasing to our ears. If people like our riches, our wealth, our high style of living, we feel so happy. Those words of compliment are nectarine to our ears. We like such people, we love them, we honour them. These words are *priya* which are pleasing to our ears. Human tendency is to seek approval or approba-

tion by other men to their worldly accomplishments and achievements. We walk away from anything that does not suit this tendency. Therefore, saints tell us that worldly acquisitions are transient and because we are ignorant of their true nature, we cling to them and like only such thoughts as would give support and encouragement to them. The Sadguru exposes the futility of coveting them and, therefore, these words are not very pleasing to our ears, our mind or our heart.

The saints are never tired of telling us the true nature of worldly things and they do not mind repeating their teaching betimes, till we take their words seriously and begin thinking of them. And when we learn the first lesson and put it in practice, then He will give us the second. How can we ask Him to go on to the second lesson when we are yet to learn the first one? But we know that He never allows us to feel impatient, dull or bored. He examines the points of first lesson from various angles, giving a variety of examples and anecdotes-only to make it interesting to us. They have taken this human form with the mission of unveiling the veil of *Maya* with the purpose of exposing the machinations of *Kal* and spotlighting the unreality of objects we value, regard and respect. And once *priya* sounds bitter and sour, we begin to realise the sweetness of the words of *hita*. Then we develop a taste for *satsang*, love for Sadguru.

All seekers of mystic experience stress the significance of developing love for the Sadguru. In ancient Indian texts, a beautiful *sloka* is mentioned:

Sadhunam darsanam punyam
Sparsanam papanasanam

Sambhashanam kotiteerdham

Vandanam moksha sadhanam

It means, the *darshan* of *sadhus* (realised souls) gives spiritual merit; their touch purifies; a dialogue with them gives the merit of visiting a crore of sacred places and; our obeisance or worship is the means to deliverance.

Through continuous association with *Sant Sadgurus* and through regularly attending their discourses, one can learn the great lesson of spirituality. Many earnest seekers received enviable spiritual guidance by attending *satsangs* of Perfect Masters. The nectarine words of the Sadguru have alchemic effect in transforming one's life. We know, when we want to pour milk in a vessel, we will first wash it, clean it and remove all impurities. Similarly, if any surface is to be painted, we first peel off all blots so that the paint registers adequately. That is why, saints tell us that we must attend *satsangs* regularly so that our lingering doubts about the inevitable spiritual path, the irresistible Perfect Master and the invaluable *nama*, are cleared and we get ready to receive the Sadguru's mercy.

Someone compared the mind to a dog's tail. Each time it is tried to be straightened, the tail rolls back and twists into a loop. It requires great effort and only a Perfect Master can work it, to straighten the dog's tail of our mind. And till such time our mind is straightened and purged of of all futile and transient entanglements, we should regularly attend *satsangs*. Here, the story of Sarvajit comes to our mind. Sarvajit was the disciple of a Guru Sarvajit means he who has conquered everything. If the name fitted him right,

he should be the man who had subdued all passions, all emotions, all desires, and could be called a perfect disciple. The story is that he used to attend on his Guru with devotion and attend his discourses regularly. After sometime, he told the Guru how fortunate he had been in being blessed by the Guru's company. He said he had been greatly benefited by the discourses and that desires could no more tempt him : he had succeeded in controlling all wants and desires. The Guru simply said: 'Fine, that is how it should be'. However, the Master knew the truth. Some days passed. One day, Sarvajit saw a pearl necklace around the neck of a dog who strays in the locality. He was told that Guru Himself put the ornament round the dog's neck. Then, he went to the Guru and said: "Pearl necklace is such an expensive thing. Why give it to the dog?. It may be stolen". "If any one wants it, let him take it." said the Guru. After a couple of days, Sarvajit requested the Guru again to remove the costly ornament and keep it in safe custody. The Guru just repeated his earlier reply.

After a few days when Sarvajit saw the dog with the necklace he told the Guru that he could as well present it to a deserving person instead of wasting it on a dog. Upon this, the Guru said: "Right, as you said, I will offer it to a deserving person. But who is deserving? I think, only a person who will share the food of a dog in the dog's dish will be the most deserving to accept the gift!" Sarvajit came away, but the thought of sharing dog's food and the reward of necklace haunted him. After all, the Guru gave the dog

only the type of food he ate: and himself washed the dog's dish clean everyday. What's wrong then, in eating food with the dog, in his own dish? Sarvajit felt. And, the Guru would be the last person to tell anybody that his disciple shared dog's food to secure the gift of a pearl necklace. Sarvajit who had been always thinking of the beautiful, lustrous, valuable pearl necklace, convinced himself that it was worth it. And having resolved about it, he approached the Guru and told him about his decision. The Guru smiled and said: "Well, well, you said you succeeded in subduing your desires. You said the discourses had benefited you so much. Now, your mind fell for a pearl necklace and is prepared for the worst to get it!" Now, this shows that our mind is like a dog's tail and it requires great effort even on the part of the Master, to straighten it

By attending *satsangs*, we receive the essential spiritual instruction and realise the need for concentration of mind and the purpose of meditation through knowing which, we come to understand the true nature of *nama* or *shabda*. The secret of *nama* is unravelled only through *satsang*. And it is through Perfect Masters alone we realise the great value of the mystic Sound.

Saints explain to us that external *satsang* is an important pre-requisite for the mystic experience of internal *satsang*. *Satsang* is a comprehensive word. Besides hearing spiritual discourses, reading the writings of the Sadguru and attending on Him, *satsang* includes performing acts of faith and charity inspired by love for, and desire to approach Him internally. And internal *satsang* is the applic-

cation of mind and spirit to the divine Sound Current at the time of practice and endeavouring to raise them to higher realms.

By attending the discourses of the Perfect Master we get to appreciate the immeasurable value of *Shabda*. If we continue to attend the *satsang* our taste for it is aroused and we begin to show greater interest and keenness to know the true nature of things. Our devotion also becomes intense and day by day we get to be drawn closer to the Sadguru. Swamiji Maharaj says: One gets the true taste of Reality by attending *satsangs* and, by drinking at the eternal fountain of spiritual wisdom, a devotee's doubts are cleared and he is helped to set himself on the path.

It is interesting that even very material minded and very adamant persons cannot escape being drawn towards Perfect Master when saints cast the net.

Man does not go in search of a Sadguru. He cannot. He is blind. It is the Master who comes in search of the 'marked souls'.

Once we are picked up by the Master, our life pattern undergoes a change because a programme is fixed for us for observance every day. We are to rise early in the morning and perform the devotional practice of sitting in meditation. During the day, we have to attend to our worldly duties with honesty and diligence. After the day's work is over, we have to engage ourselves again in the 'service' of the Sadguru. Knowing that craving for worldly pleasures and luxuries is injurious to our spiritual well being, we should abstain from it and become aware of the mischief mind can cause.

We should live on honestly-earned income and be content with what we earn by the sweat of our brow and spend a part of it in the service of the Master. And living such a disciplined life by ever thinking of the Sadguru, we develop great love for Him.

All this transformation can be brought about only by attending *satsangs*. That is why Swamiji Maharaj exclaims: How can I state the worth and greatness of *satsang*? No other method do I find as good as *satsang* in Kaliyuga, particularly. Great indeed is the praise of *satsang*. *Satsang* is a sort of fence around our life of spiritual research.

Guru Nank says 'God's wealth is earned in the company of the holy. And where God is remembered, there He goes as a friend and helper.' In *Japji Sahib*, a spiritual text of the Sikhs, it is explained that when the hands, feet and other parts of the body are covered with filth, it is removed by washing with water : when our clothes are soiled and polluted, the impurities are washed away by applying soap and when the sins of mind are sought to be washed, the washing can be done only with the holy water of the *nama*; by keeping the company of the holy, we obtain the most powerful detergent to purify ourselves' But the company of the saints is obtained only through the mercy of the Supreme Being. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, the Lord himself says. 'Through repeated remembrance of Me and through constant love for Me, the mind of man gets dissolved in Me.'

Wherever we fix the mind, it will get attached there. The mind revolves round the kind of sights we repeatedly see, the words we hear, the food we take and the objects we smell and touch. And

the more it revolves round an object, the more it develops attachment for it. That is why saints tell, seekers after material pleasures identify themselves with the enjoyments. Seekers of *Sat*, the Truth, become *Sat* themselves. Our mind is like a mirror-it reflects whatever is exposed before it. If an untidy ugly thing is placed before it, we see the reflection of the ugly thing in the mirror. If a noble, good, ideal object is held up in the field, the reflection is simply divine. Therefore, we should try to keep our image clean and pure.

In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* it is mentioned 'noble thoughts are given to a society in which God's glory is always heard and recited. Our ears should be engaged in the *nama* and glory of God, our tongue in the repetition of the Divine Name, and our heart in the remembrance of the Divine Form.' And a society which practises all these, is the true *Sangat*, the assembly of disciples. The members enjoy constant association with the Sadguru, enjoy constant singing of the glory of the Lord and enjoy living within His will.

The characteristic features of *satsangis* are common. They enjoy the company of the *satsangis* as much as the company of the Sadguru Himself because, by meeting a *satsangi*, by talking to him, they intensify their love for the Master. And it is common knowledge that when two devotees meet, the topic that comes up for conversation is not the weather, nor the rising prices, nor the vexatious politics, nor worldly enjoyments - but the Master and the Master alone. Only His grace and His discourses are their interest.

In English we say : 'Show me your friend, I'll

say what you are !' A punter keeps a punter's company, a rogue keeps a rogue's company, a politician keeps a politician's company. Similarly, a devotee keeps a devotee's company. That is why, the Sadgurus tell us that we should exercise great care in choosing our company. *Manmukhs* keep *manmukh's* company and *Gurumukhs* keep *Gurumukh's* company. And it is only through a *Gurumukh's* company, we can seek liberation from the snares of this world. And *Gurumukh's* company is the *satsang*.

Lord Buddha also stresses the importance and value of keeping the company of devotees. One of the main principles of Buddhism as stated earlier, *sangham saranam gachhami*—the society of seekers should be my refuge. Because, in the *sangha* the subject of talk would be how to seek enlightenment, how to traverse to path to deliverance as instructed by the Master. That is, how to cultivate detachment to the worldly pleasures and seek attachment with what is spiritually good and through it reach Buddhahood.

As Sankaracharya says *satsang* leads to detachment, detachment to renunciation, renunciation to equanimity, and equanimity to death--while -living. Thus, for the attainment of that state of *jivan-mukti* the basic requisite is *satsang*. Kabir also says : "Attend the *satsangs* and keep the company of saints, it will help you to destroy all spiritual illness and make you divine in course of time."

A washerman does not refuse to wash our clothes however soiled or dirty they may be. Because he knows, if not with the first wash, with second one, all the dirt can be washed off.

Similarly, the Sadguru does not refuse to purify even the vilest of sinners - but takes all men, with equal kindness, under His protective care. Again, through His blessing, the minds of men do not hanker wildly. Guru Arjun Dev sings the glory of the company of saints in one *ashtapadi*. He says . 'In the company of saints, man glimpses the invisible. In the company of saints, man endures the unendurable. In the company of saints man reaches the heights of spirit. In the company of saints man reaches the Lord's Presence. In the company of saints, man is aware only of God.'

In another beautiful piece, Guru Arjun Dev talks of the glory of the place where God's name is remembered, where Sadguru's protection is sought, where *satsangs* are held : 'Blessed, beautiful is the hut where the Lord's praise is sung. In the bliss of poverty, in the contentment of humility, in the company of seekers, in the holy congregation, in the beautiful little hut resides the Lord.'

Through attending *satsang* a devotee can win the love of the Master, and with His kindly guidance meditate on the holy name and on the holy form of the Lord and in fullness of time become one with Him. The sole purpose of human birth, as the Perfect Master says, is to put an end to the birth'-cycle and merge back in Him. We had been part of the Supreme Being and our original home is where He resides.

Saint Jnaneshwar says : 'As ripples of water, fragrance of camphor, brightness of jewels are not separate-like, the oneness of the thread and the cloth, or the clay and the jar, likewise, my Beloved

is one with Me.' Kabir also says that there is no distinction between the self of the seeker and Universal Self of the Supreme Being - just like, the river and its waves are one surf; when the wave rises, it is the water and when it falls, it is the same water again. Because, it has been named as wave it does not cease to be called water. That is why, the mystics of India exclaimed *Tvamevham* - I am Thou or Thou art me.

THE IDEAL DEVOTEE-I

IN a couplet included in the *Adi Granth*, Kabir says: "Keep thy mind steadfast under the Guru's instruction; in this way thou shalt drink the nectar. The Guru's arrow hath pierced this adamant age, and let in the light of God's word. The Guru without putting an arrow on his bow hath pierced this world, my brethren. By the favour of the Guru thou shalt obtain the wealth of God."

And giving a series of analogies, Kabir emphasizes the need for a True Guru : 'Can a man without feet ever leap? Can a man without a mouth burst into laughter? Can a man repose without sleep? Can one churn milk without a churn? Can a cow without an udder give milk? Can one accomplish a long journey without a road? So, the way cannot be found without a True Guru.' By offering his unswerving *bhakti* to the Sadguru, a devotee can receive guidance in the mystic path.

Etymologically, *bhakti* means service. That means a *bhakta* (devotee) should offer himself in complete service of the Guru. And ability or capacity to serve the Master and live in His will is the main criterion.

Ramanujacharya, the great south Indian saint, recommends seven means to a man of devotion:

Discrimination of food. One must be careful about his food. He should not eat meat or fish or partake alcoholic drinks. In the path of the mystics,

one must abstain from non-vegetarian food and wines and liquors because partaking of these things causes *tamasic* or dark qualities. The *Chandogya Upanishad* states: "As a man eats, so becomes his mind." If a man takes *tamasic* food, his mind will be full of evil ideas. He will not be able to concentrate his mind and sit in meditation. Such food defiles the mind and the mind gets obstinate, stubborn and uncontrollable. The south Indian saint Tayumanavar says in one of his well-known compositions: 'One can tame the powerful elephant in rut; one can bind the mouth of the bear and the fierce tiger; one can ride a lion on its back; one can take a cobra and make it dance; one can place mercury on burning fire and alchemise the five metals; one can wander about the world without being seen by another; one can obtain gods as his servants; one can retain perpetual youth; one can enter another's body; walk on water, sit on fire and acquire matchless miraculous powers. But rare is the capacity to subdue the thoughts and remain quiet. O Lord, who is the one truly existent being, take possession of my mind!'

Man thinks he drinks liquor for enjoyment and solace. But in the long run alcohol becomes the cause of his ruin. That is why people should eschew alcoholism. For securing enjoyment or tranquility of mind, *Guru-bhakti* or devotion to the Guru, with a pure mind is the most effective way. Meerabai says: "People may drink liquor for enjoyment, I drink the nectar of Hari's name and experience bliss." Therefore, saints ask us to be away from non-vegetarian food and intoxicating drinks and cultivate a *sattwic* state of mind in order to worship God.

The second means to a man of devotion is: *Giving up of desires for sensual enjoyment*. The Sadguru always says that we should not run away from this world. Nothing will have been really achieved by forcing on ourselves a false sense of detachment from worldly pleasures. We may be able to contain worldly allurements as long as we hold them in our grip. But the moment there is a let up, mind comes back to its former moorings. Some of the so-called *sadhus* of India prove this point. They closed their eyes, their ears and their nose and sat in a far off forest or in a deep mountain cave and performed penance. They thought they had subdued their passions, their sensual desires. The episode in which sage Vishwamitra falls prey to the 'alluring and irresistible' beauty of Menaka is too well-known. In our spiritual literature we read the story of a seeker who, after years of penance on a mountain peak, comes down to a village at the foothills seeking food. He stops in front of a house and asks for food. As the housewife is busy preparing food for him, the children playing outside the house shout and yell in merriment. Now, as long as the man was on the mountain peak away from the maddening crowd, he was used to absolute silence. And when he hears the children yelling and shouting, he feels annoyed and outshouts the children in anger, "Why do you not learn to be quiet?" Now, he believed that he had controlled his anger. But it was so as long as things were conducive to such an achievement. And when the situation varied, the real nature of the mind manifested itself in uncontrollable anger. Unless we cultivate a sense of detachment, mind cannot be

subdued and cleansed. Therefore, the Guru teaches us that we should live the life of a householder without entangling ourselves in worldly relationships. The law-giver Manu says: "One who tries to rush to that stage by running away from society, will be defeated when faced with same circumstances again." Therefore, he should remove love for material things and should discharge the obligations to family and to society in a detached manner.

Then comes the third means which helps a devotee in his spiritual pursuit - *practice of concentration of mind*. Unless we purge our mind of all afflictions and impurities, it is not possible to attain concentration. And with concentration, one achieves peace of mind because a concentrated mind is an empty mind. The mind does not think of anything. It is a state of *shunya*, void. Our purpose and aim is not to achieve voidness, but to acquire that state of voidness and fill it with divine thoughts. In Vedantic parlance, meditation is defined as: 'The direction of attention on a stream of ideas consonant with the non-dual *Brahman* to the exclusion of such foreign ideas as body, senses, mind and ego.' And meditation practised uninterruptedly, for a long time, with intense devotion to the ideal, and with unflagging determination, leads to the knowledge of the seeker's complete identity with *Brahman*.

Daily observances or householder's obligations are the next means prescribed for a devotee. We have to receive and honour our guests. We have to be hospitable to our friends. Even in adverse circumstances, when we are not in a position to treat guests

with love and affection, we should endeavour to do our duty. The ever compassionate Lord is there as an omnipresent force to help us. He will take care of the situation.

Then comes another series of means to a man of devotion—*cultivation of compassion, equanimity, uprightness, purity and modesty*. These are the features one dovetailing into another. Compassion towards all is a noble trait. If we want to love God, we must learn to love His creation. We must do unto others what we expect others to do unto us. Ancient sages called it the principle of *Atmavat sarva bhutani* -- all creatures are like my own self. When we are able to erase the feelings of 'I' and 'you', we can succeed in acquiring equanimity of mind because these superficial distinctions between 'you' and 'me' are the prime causes of difference, dispute and dissent. And once we are able to cultivate a feeling of equality, we acquire the moral courage for uprightness to call a spade a spade, to point right as right. That leads a devotee towards purity. The Sadguru asks us to acquire purity of mind and through it try to uncover or remove the many layers of darkness over our soul. He tells us that our soul is a resplendent entity and that we are unable to comprehend its true nature because our mind is full of filth and dirt. And whoever is able to purify himself, cleanse himself of all impurities and afflictions becomes an ideal devotee. All ideal devotees are humble and modest.

Then Ramanuja mentions *non-dejection in adversity and absence of elation in happiness*. Saints tell us that we should not feel elated when some thing good happens to us and begin to jump and dance

because, happiness in this world is not a permanent feature. Similarly, if adversity strikes us, we should not feel dejected and start wailing and moaning. That only shows lack of balance of mind. Once we sit at the feet of the Sadguru, it is entirely His mercy to do what He wills with us. If He thinks that by adverse circumstance, we will be benefited spiritually, He gives us only such a situation. In fact, great saints of the past, always wished for adversity for, through that alone they said people would be able to set their mind on the Supreme Being. Kabir says that in adversity all pray the Lord but in happiness none remembers His name. A state of sorrow says the Sadguru, is of great significance to a seeker because, in that depressed state, mind does not think of any other thing except the misery—it is a kind of concentration. Since man wants to get out of that situation, his mind will be set on the Lord who only can save the situation. That is why saints always prayed God to give them not happiness, nor prosperity but misery and poverty.

With misery the heart gets softened, the will gets toughened and objects become one. With poverty, material entanglements would be snapped and humility and obedience will be the chief characteristics. The rich are always busy collecting rents, dividends and debt repayments. If anything goes wrong anywhere they get upset. With that the whole mental balance is disturbed. We have read the story of the cobbler and the merchant. Once there was a rich, kind merchant in a city who lived in a big mansion. On the other side of the road a cobbler had his shop. As he worked,

the cobbler, a God-minded man, used to sing devotional songs. The merchant was interested in spiritual matters but had hardly found time to attend *satsang* or to read the teachings of great masters. After some time, the merchant fell sick and was bed-ridden. All day, he used to hear the divine songs sung by the cobbler while attending to his work. The merchant would get lost in the *kirtan* and would forget all about his sickness. He was cured in a short time. He then called the cobbler to him and thanked him saying that it was his *bhajans* that helped him to get well soon. In gratitude, the merchant offered Rs. 50 and the cobbler collected the money and went away. Now, in his mind set in a new worry-where to keep the money safe. This disturbed his mind and he could not sing devotional songs while working. Even if he sang, the songs were devoid of devotional fervour. He was very sad. Soon one day he appeared before the rich merchant and said: "Sir, please take back your money-owing to it I have not been able to enjoy the company of God and sing His praise". He returned the money and came back to his humble shop. The worry of keeping the money safe gone, the cobbler could again think of God and sing *bhajans* of His glory. That is why saints tell us that those who are rich or happy cannot think of God and enjoy the real bliss of His remembrance. Only adversity and poverty give the ideal state of mind to a man of devotion.

According to the Veera Shaiva saints of south India, the Sadguru bestows three boons on the disciple: One-*Deeksha*, initiation. Two-*Shiksha*, instruction. Three-*Moksha*, deliverance. The Guru

tests the disciple to find out whether he is in a fit condition of mind to receive initiation. He satisfies Himself with regard to the genuine desire of the seeker to receive spiritual guidance and then grants him. Now, about the word *Deeksha* — ‘Dee’ means granting of knowledge and ‘ksha’ means eradication of the impurities clinging to the individuals. The impurities are called the *Malatraya*—the *anav*, causal; the *maya*, subtle; and the *karmic*, gross body. When a devotee receives initiation, he will be free from all the *sutakas*, impurities.

The word *deeksha* has a wide connotation. It is also called *upadesha* — ‘upa’ is near; ‘desha’ is teaching. It is also called *Namadana*. ‘Nama’ is the Word or Shabda or the Divine Sound and ‘dana’ is charity, blessing, benediction. The initiation is also called investiture and from ancient times is regarded so holy that it acquired the significance of second birth. A devotee who is initiated by a Sadguru automatically earns divine protection. He starts his life afresh, on a clean slate; therefore, it is said to be second birth. It encourages a disciple to spend the rest of his life in prayer, in worship of the Sadguru. And by offering our *bhakti*, which means *seva*, to the Guru who is the human manifestation of the Divine Sound, we acquire tranquility of mind, sit in meditation and with His guidance traverse upwards internally.

As a *Deekshaguru*, the preceptor initiates the disciple in the spiritual knowledge and as a *Shukshaguru*, the preceptor gives him necessary instruction and training to progress on the spiritual path. It is here-as elsewhere-the need for a living

Guru, the Guru in a human form, should be realised. Unless we sit near a Sadguru we cannot learn anything. This 'sitting near' is called *upasana* in ancient Indian texts. It also came to mean worship and devotion. Then the third *Mokshaguru* or *Jnanaguru* who reveals to the disciple the esoteric secret of the purpose of human birth and helps him in all respects to receive mystic experience to attain the final beauty, eternal truth.

Basaveshwara, the Veera Shaiva saint, says : "Just as clay and gold are first required to fashion out jar and ornaments, a Guru is the first requisite for the realisation of God." The Guru is the cause of our spiritual birth and He is primarily responsible for the salvation of the disciple. In the absence of the preceptor's grace none can achieve success in this. By leaving a naked wick, we cannot ask God to save it from extinguishing. By simply sitting near a Sadguru, we cannot claim the benefit of His spiritual guidance or protection. By right and pure living and by living within His will, we please Him, we satisfy Him, and convince Him of our intense desire for union.

We should learn from the story of Ram Bhaj. Once a certain man named Ram Bhaj was vexed with the problems of a householder and decided to renounce the world and seek deliverance. He met a saint who was living on a hill-top and told him that he was fed up with life and prayed him for initiation. The saint allowed him to stay in the *ashram* and Ram Bhaj began serving him with devotion. Some months passed and Ram Bhaj was eager to receive initiation but could not ask the saint for it. One morning when Ram Bhaj brought

water from the stream, the saint emptied the pot on the ground and asked him to fetch water again. He brought another potful of water and again the saint threw it on the ground asking for more water. Like this, Ram Bhaj brought many potfuls of water and each time he brought, the saint splashed out the water on the ground. The stream was far away at the foothill and the path up hill was uneven and winding and going down and coming up, Ram Bhaj was exhausted and tired. The householder wondered why the saint was pouring out the water each time he brought a potful. He felt peeved, annoyed. When the saint asked him to fetch one more potful of water, he sat down in exhaustion and said : "No, I will not go now !" The saint smiled and patted the amateur seeker and asked, "Is that all ? You are tired with this?" and said, "One has to suffer hardship in doing one's duty. Without patience and perseverance, a disciple cannot achieve anything. These are the first steps to spiritual training and those who get impatient at the very first step, cannot go up and reach their goal : Go home now, attend to your duties as a householder with sincerity and perseverance and when you get happiness in householders's life, you will be able to attain happiness in spiritual life also."

Then, talking of perseverance we have heard of the great disciple, Nachiketa mentioned in the *Kathopanishad*. Young Nachiketa stood at the door of Yama, the lord of Death, for three days and three nights. Yama was pleased with him and offered whatever boon he might demand. Nachiketa was not interested in long life, or great

wealth, but prayed for spiritual knowledge. He insisted on being imparted only that permanent wealth of True Knowledge. He could not be dissuaded from his intense desire to know the Eternal Truth. And Yama could not but reveal to him the Divine Knowledge. The words Yama utters finally are of great significance. He says : "O Nachiketa, you have not taken the road that leads to wealth in which many men perish. You are one who desires knowledge, for even many pleasures have not tempted you. You have obtained it now, holding fast to truth. May we always have an enquirer like you." That is to say, may we always have a persistent, patient, persevering enquirer like Nachiketa. Only these qualities reward a disciple with the greatest truth.

We have another ideal devotee in Satyakama of the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Though of obscure and probably illegitimate parentage, he was accepted as a disciple by the sage Gautama, because he spoke the truth about it. And returning from the forest after tending the cattle, Satyakama was revealed the truth of self by the Nature. But he prayed his Guru for real illumination because he knew that Eternal Truth in all its splendour could be revealed only by a living human Sadguru and not by others. The Guru was pleased with him and imparted the secret of True Knowledge.

And coming to the aspect of living within the will of Sadguru and total surrender to His wishes as a means to becoming an ideal devotee, we heard many significant stories about the disciples of the Sikh Gurus. Now, Sikhism is one religion which is based entirely on ideal discipleship. Sikh means

Shishya in Sanskrit, meaning, disciple, or student. It is through love and devotion, through self-effacing worship of the Guru, a disciple can achieve spiritual merit. Guru Nanak says that the key to spiritual redemption is in the hands of the Guru and none else can open the door of spirituality. Guru is the manifestation of God who is eternal, who has no birth nor death. In *Sukhmani*, Guru Arjun Dev says · I bow to the Master who was in the beginning, I bow to the Master who was when time began. I bow to the Sadguru, the True and Ever lasting. I bow to the Gurudeva my Master, in human form.

The saints of Sikhism say that there is great happiness in living in the word of the Sadguru. And the great test of a true and ideal disciple lies in one's ability to obey the command of the Guru. An episode is mentioned from the life of Guru Govind Singh to show how some vainglorious disciples are exposed when the Guru puts them to test. Once when Guru Govind Singh had to leave Anandpur Sahib owing to the enemy thrust, one devotee by name Dalla swore that if the Guru had sent him a word about it, he would have fought back the enemy even laying down his life. Upon this, the Guru desired to test him. He picked up a weapon and said that the new kind of fire-arm needed to be tested for quality and that he would like to try it on a man. The Guru asked Dalla to get some one for this purpose and Dalla simply ordered his men to procure somebody but none came forward because none wished to be killed. Then the Guru asked Dalla to offer himself but he excused himself pleading mercy in the name

of his young children. The Guru smiled and Dalla was exposed. Later, when the Guru asked one of his horsemen, all of them rushed forward offering to obey the Guru's command. They were lined up and the Guru fired shots---in the air : In fact, the Guru did not want to test any disciple really nor did he intend to kill any. He only wanted to remove the ego of Dalla.

An ideal devotee who offers himself totally, completely and unswervingly to the Guru through *seva* and through meditation becomes, in course of time, the Guru himself. Our real self is a part of that Universal Self and at the opportune time the part merges with the Whole. Also, the profound truth is often said that all saints had once been seekers, all Gurus had once been devotees. By serving the Guru, a devotee becomes the Guru himself.

The distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped, the teacher and the taught, the Guru and the disciple is seen only in the initial stage. After *namadan*, the initiation, the distinction between the individual and the Sadguru begins to disappear. Through living a life of purity, and meditation, the pace is accelerated towards realising the radiant form of the Sadguru and merging in it.

THE IDEAL DEVOTEE-II

ALL creation is divided into five categories according to the number and predominance of elements incorporated in each. The five elements are - water, fire, air, ether and earth. The plant life is the first in which the element of water is most predominant. In insect life the two elements of fire and air are more active, the rest of the three *tattvas* are dormant. In the winged life, - the birds - only water, fire and air can be seen. The fourth kind of life is the animal in which four of the five elements are active. As the fifth element is not present, animals do not have intellect. And in man, all the five elements are active.

Saints tell us that God has blessed us with human birth so that we try to pray Him, worship Him and reach Him. We know that we have more of unwanted and abhorrible qualities than the ideal and good qualities. Like the swan which has the unique faculty of separating wholesome milk from water, we should try to shed all those qualities which can be impediments to reach the Lord and preserve and develop the few noble qualities. Then, saints again tell us, that no man has ever reached God save through a Sadguru. That is the law God has made and He has also ordained the advent of Sadgurus into this world. When the Sadguru appears, He comes as the Supreme Lord's representative and acts as man's

friend, philosopher and guide. Therefore, man has to show Him the love, affection and loyalty one shows to his friend. Only through a spiritual guide, we can realise the self and the indwelling Supreme Spirit. Saints do not tell us that in order to attain to the Inner Verity, we have to renounce the world and lead the life of a monk in a forest hermitage or a cave dwelling. We have to attend to our normal duties as a human being and earn our living through honest means - constantly remembering the Lord. Our mind must be set on the God Almighty while the arms are busy attending to worldly duties. When the situation is ripe and opportune, the teacher appears; the Master manifests.

As in the case of any material pursuit, the Sadguru cannot be obtained easily and cheaply. The devotee has to cultivate the right mind which will enable him to perceive the Guru spiritually; the devotee has to restrain and condition his life and get ready to welcome him; the devotee has to lead a life of austerity and renunciation—free from the entanglements of attachment, greed, passion and anger. The disciple should offer his *tan*, *man* and *dhan*—body, mind and acquisitions to the Guru. The disciple has to regard his Guru as his spiritual parent—which He is—and should think that there is no greater happiness than living in the will and command of the Guru. He has to eschew distracting pleasures and refrain from indulgence in worldly pursuits. He has to render unto his Guru unstinted service.

The Indian mysticism prescribes four kinds of service or *seva* for a disciple. *Seva* is a necessary

part of the spiritual discipline through which a devotee has to pass. *Seva* is not only service of the Guru, but includes adherence to the Guru's teachings, and service of mankind. It is through *seva* that a disciple is able to free himself from the snares of the world. Jesus Christ said. . . "if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." In *Sar Bachan* Swamiji Maharaj says "Much fruit shall his service yield thee; one day *Sat Lok* shalt thou attain." Here are the four kinds of service :

Service with wealth : The disciple should give all his wealth freely in the service of the Guru. There can be no better use to worldly wealth than offering to the last pie in the service of the Guru. But we should always keep it in mind that the Sadguru has no use for this wealth. This *seva* inculcates in us a sense of renunciation and the Master uses this wealth only for the good of the poor and needy. Kabir says that the Guru does not want the money of the disciple :

*Shish ko aisa chahiye Guru ko sarbas de
Guru ko aisa chahiye shish ka kachu na le*

That means, it is necessary for the disciple to offer *everything* to his Guru, and it is also ordained that the Guru would accept *nothing* from the disciple. It is clear that the purpose of this *seva* is only that we should use the wealth in a way that helps to subdue our passions, sever our entanglements and takes us nearer to the Beloved Guru. By accepting our offerings, the Sadguru encourages us to detach ourselves from the transitory riches and take to the eternal wealth *Shabda*. This service is, generally, more practicable in the case of affluent disciples—but each one of us can offer

something according to our means. In fact, wealth need not be in terms of money, hard cash. Anything we have earned through honest means, is wealth. We see that one offers a few bags of grain, another places at His feet a small one ounce bottle with freshly prepared ghee. An old woman offers a few hundred grammes of beans grown in her yard, a young man presents a colour portrait of the Guru which he has done as a classroom exercise. Now, all these things are wealth so far as the individuals are concerned and the Master accepts them with love and kindness because they offer to Him the wealth they create.

There are many stories singing the spiritual purpose of *seva*. In the Buddhist *Jataka Kathas* we read the interesting story of an old woman who offered a half-eaten pomegranate to the Master. Once when the Buddha was camping in Rajagriha, he set apart a day for receiving offerings from the devotees. He sat under a tree and began accepting offerings. Emperor Bimbisara offered huge properties—land, buildings and jewellery followed by Prince Ajatashatru who offered most valuable things to the Master. Afterwards, a number of wealthy disciples made their offerings. Then suddenly, an old woman appeared and addressed the Master : “O divine being, I have heard of the *seva* only just now. You know, I am a helpless, aged woman. I have nothing with me to offer. When I heard of your presence here, I had already eaten a half of this pomegranate and I have brought this to offer it to you. Will you accept this, my Lord?” When the woman said this, the Enlightened One stood up and received the humble offering.

Thus, the Master would accept any offering that a disciple chooses to make, according to one's capacity. In this case, the Buddha rose from His seat and walked up to the old woman to accept the offering because, He knows that she is offering her entire wealth, unlike the rich who offered only a small part of their wealth. And if a disciple offers all his wealth to the last pie, the Guru is so kind that he would not allow him to suffer for want of means.

Service with body : The second kind of service the disciple should offer to his Master is with his body. That is, offering of manual labour. Whether one is high or low, the service easy or difficult, the disciple must serve the Guru, the way he is told to do. This kind of *seva* is not to test one's physical fitness but to erase from one's mind all feelings of ego and pride. The Master desires that we shun bloated ideas of status, rank or position in worldly life.

We know the most inspiring story of a devoted disciple of the Muslim saint, Sheikh Farid. Once a disciple was serving his *murshid* with all sincerity and dedication doing every command of his master with implicit obedience. He never cared even if the work he did meant physical discomfort. One day, the teacher asked him to fetch some fire. The disciple looked everywhere but could not get fire. There was a house in the vicinity in which a dancing girl lived. He decided to go in and ask for fire. The prostitute nursed a secret love for this young handsome disciple. But the young man had been so much engrossed in his teacher's service that he never even noticed her. Now, this was an

opportunity for the woman to express her mind. When the man asked if he could get some fire, she said, "O yes, the price of fire is the eyes!" Even before she completed saying this, the man pierced his fingers into his eyes, removed the eye-balls and offered them to her. She was so frightened at this unexpected development that without saying a word, she gave him the fire. This shows that in the service of the Guru, a disciple must offer everything without hesitation. But, there is another point - the Guru does not wish that his disciple injure himself in His service. When the disciple appeared before the Guru with the fire and with bandaged eyes, the Guru enquired as to what had happened. The devotee said, "The eyes have come out." Upon this, the Master said, "Then, remove the bandage!" The disciple who had complete faith in his Guru removed the bandage. And lo ! the eyes were intact - as bright as ever.

It is a question of faith in the word of the Master and only those who have complete faith in Him, receive the benefit of spiritual guidance from Him. We have the story of Kabir and Loi. One day Kabir wanted to demonstrate what was faith. He asked Loi to find the needle he had dropped on the ground. When she began to search for the needle, Kabir said, "Are you mad ? How do you think, you can find a small needle in darkness ?" When she heard these words from her Master, she really felt it was dark and night. Therefore, she brought a lamp and began searching for the needle. But she could not find. Later, Kabir who had hidden the needle under his arm dropped it and said, "Look, I have found the needle myself!" Thus,

the Masters teach us the virtues of patience, faith and devotion through various means.

Service with mind : The third kind of service is with the mind. The disciple should offer his mind and intellect to the Guru. He should use his intelligence and understand the teachings of his Guru with a view to translating the philosophy of the saints in action. That means, the disciple should be able to practise concentration of the mind and sit in meditation to enjoy the sweet sound of the Divine Melody. He should have no reservations about the power and glory of the Guru. Because, it is always the mind which takes us off the course with all sorts of doubts and suspicions. He should try to overcome all such inhibitions by learning not only through the word of mouth of the Guru but also learning from His experience. He should know that when he has achieved the Sadguru, he has no need for the trinkets of the world. The Guru beckons all, but only a few listen to the call to share in the infinite happiness which has become the Guru's.

It is said that there are two stages in the spiritual discipline to be undergone before the intuition of the Divine Melody can be gained. The first is the stage of moral, intellectual and emotional preparation. It consists of discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal, detachment from all selfish pursuits, cultivation of the cardinal virtues, and intense longing for meeting the Sadguru and through Him seeking release. The second stage consists of three steps—*sravana*, hearing; *Manana*, reflective thinking and; *Nidhidhyasana*, meditative contemplation. The process may not

be unlike the one pursued by the scientist in his field of inquiry. But there is one difference. While the object of the scientist's inquiry remains at all stages external to him, the object of spiritual discipline is the deeper reality of the inquirer himself - a reality which he realizes to be the basis of all things. The Sadguru says that if there is any real scientific laboratory, it is the human body itself. And that one has to enter the human laboratory to test the scientific truth.

Discipleship is nothing but *Bhakti Yoga* according to ancient Indian thought. The Yoga consists of sublimating one's emotions by turning them toward the Ultimate. A South Indian saint says, "The emotional feeling which, in the case of the ignorant, flows toward sense-objects, is called *bhakti* when directed to the Supreme Lord. Love for things that are transient is the cause of misery. Love for God, His manifestation, the Guru who is the eternal source of all things, makes for everlasting happiness." Sage Narada describes the true nature of a disciple's *bhakti*: "It is as if a dumb man who has tasted delicious food, could not speak about it. It is an experience, pure and selfless, subtle, unbroken and ever expanding. A disciple who has experienced God-love will see that alone, hear that alone and speak of that alone, for he ever thinks of that alone."

A well-disciplined life attains its fullest development. For a disciple who has attained to that state, the call of the Infinite becomes irresistible. He becomes a living demonstration of reality of God and the ultimate unreality of material existence. And in the *Mahabharata*, it is said that "a

man should give up individuality for the sake of the family, the family for the sake of the country, the country for the sake of the world and everything should be given up for the liberation of the self." And all these noble qualities can be achieved only if a disciple is able to conquer his mind by offering it away to the Sadguru. That is why, saints tell us that the *seva* of *Manas*, offering of the mind, is an important aspect of the disciple's service to the Sadguru.

Service with soul: Then comes the fourth and last kind of service—service with the soul, offering of one's self. Swamiji Maharaj explains this service in these words: A disciple should sit in a quiet corner and concentrate within himself, practise *nama* and achieve peace of mind. By turning the two petals of the eyes within, he should rise up to the inner sky, get entranced and ring the inner melody. He should perceive the *jyoti*, the luminous astral form of the Lord, and then see the sun of the causal plane. After that, going further up he should behold the moon at the *Parabrahma* stage and attain the radiance of twelve suns. Then he should continue his journey and reach the *Sat Lok* for permanent residence there. The experience of the Divine Melody of that realm makes the disciple joyous and happy. Then he shall know the greatness of his Guru, by whose grace the Melody is caused and heard by him.

This is supreme enjoyment. As Sankaracharya says: Capacity for enjoyment means capacity for suffering also. In spiritual pursuit, a disciple's capacity for suffering is first tested. He should become seasoned and mature in his desire to attain the

Supreme and enjoy the Supreme bliss. He should learn to die while living so that he learns to live after death. Saints tell us that all that is born is destined to perish. That is the law of God, none can circumvent that law. The date and time of one's birth as well as death are prefixed.

There is an interesting story in Indian classics. Once one *Yama duta*, an angel of death, going along a street in a city around mid-day, saw a man coming out of a house and said: "So, you are here." And the man who was so terrified ran and ran for his life and reached the king's court. He begged of the king that he be saved from death; that he be given a horse which could run super-fast. The king said: "We have two horses—one runs as fast as sound and the other at the speed of the mind. Which one do we give you, my dear man?" "O King, give me the one which could travel as fast as the mind." So the king gave the man the fastest running horse. He flew off in a jiffy and reached another city the next moment. The big gate of that city was just being closed because it was evening already and the man just managed to get through. And hardly had he covered a few yards inside the city, he swooned and fell dead! The king who heard of the entire drama, asked the angel of death about it. He was told that God had ordered that the man's life would end astride a horse in that city and at that time. When that was so, how would he be in this city at that time? Therefore, as willed by the Lord, he would literally chase and walk into death.

The will of God in creating life and in ending life has been accepted by all faiths. Almost a simi-

lar story appears in Maulana Rumi's *Masnavi*. One morning a nobleman came to Solomon's hall of justice his face pale with sorrow. Solomon enquired what was the matter. He replied, "Azrael, the angel of death, cast on me such a look so full of wrath." The king said, "What boon do you desire now?" "O protector of my life!" he said, "Command the wind to bear me from here to India. May be I will save my life." Solomon ordered the wind to bear him quickly over the water to the uttermost part of India. Next day, at the time of conference, Solomon said to Azrael: "Did you look with anger on that Muslim in order that he might wander as an exile far from his home?" Azrael said: "When did I look on him angrily? I saw him as I passed by, and looked at him in astonishment, for God had commanded me saying that to-day I take his spirit in India. From wonder, I said to myself 'Even if he has a hundred wings, it is a far journey for him to be in India to-day!'"

Therefore, saints tell us that life is impermanent and we should sit before a Sadguru and make good use of the short span of life through making regular sojourns in the spiritual realm. But as Kabir says: *Hamare man kab bhajiho Guru Nam*—when has our mind prayed to the Guru? Our childhood passes in being caressed and fondled by elders; when we are in youth, our mind is spread all over the world; in old age when wrinkles show up and skin loosens, we get hard of hearing and our vision gets blurred. And our children quarrel among themselves keeping our mind constantly worried. When, *when* really, does our mind pray to the Sadguru? And when it is too late we feel sorry for having wasted our life.

That is why, in another poem Kabir warns that we should not have any regard for this life. He preaches that without devotion to the Sadguru, the body would be rendered useless and futile. It is through repentance and intense longing for the grace of the Sadguru a disciple can fulfil the purpose of his human birth. The South Indian saint Appar says: "He set up the bones, covering them up with nerves and skin, making me something of a shape; He established me in happiness, wiping off my past sins, making my mind His temple, loving me and making me His attendant but without remaining in the presence of the Lord who blessed me with all this, I have been all along committing the folly of discarding the hare and running after the crow." And when Appar found the feet of the Master, he exclaimed: "Like flawless music of the lute, like the evening moon, like the blowing southern breeze, like the young expansive spring, like the lotus pond humming with bees, is the shade of the feet of the Lord, my Master."

Another South Indian saint Jnanasambandhar describes the nature of the Master: "He is indeed the sweet sugarcane; He blesses his devotees with the bliss that make them melt, He abides on top and abides in numberless shrines; though transcending the very heavens, He has a victorious form that the world might worship." The same feelings of joy are expressed by the other saints also. Sheikh Farid said, "Sugar, honey and milk are all sweet but incomparable is the sweetness of the name of the Lord." Bhadrachala Ramadas of Andhra sang of the glorious divine sweetness of *Rama nama* almost in similar words.

How could they experience the bliss of realising the Guru's form? Unless a disciple longs for the Master's *darshan*, pines for it intensely, sheds tears incessantly out of separation, makes his heart wet with sincere devotion, he cannot find the Guru. The Sadguru says. Just as owing to the heat of the sun, the fruit ripens and becomes luscious and delicious; just as owing to the fire, wholesome and tasty food is cooked, the intense yearning of a disciple prepares him and matures him into realising the Guru. The fire of yearning acts as a crucible in which just as gold becomes a bright yellowish precious metal, the devotion of a disciple becomes seasoned and pure. When someone asked Farid why the *koel*, the cuckoo bird, was black, the Master replied: "The bird cried incessantly for the mate and burnt by the fire of separation, turned black."

This should be our ideal. We should crave for the Guru's *darshan*, we should yearn for Him and experience that feeling of separation, pain and death like a fish thrown out of water. Charandas gives expression to his feelings of agony at the non-appearance of the Master saying: "The voice gets choked, tears trickle down day and night, night and day, as I yearn for the Master; my heart will split into two. O Master, when does that day come when I can have the blessing of the Lord's *darshan*?" Meerabai says: "Pity, what do they know, when my body became white with the intense yearning for the Lord, these people send for the doctor thinking it to be leukemia." And Hafiz says that the fire of longing is so intense that if he expressed it by word of mouth, his tongue might get burnt. And if he would not, his bones and flesh might be reduced to

ashes. And, with a feeling of spiritual disgust, he prays to the Lord not to give longing and pining for the Guru to any man. However, he asserts that without a moistened and tearful heart none has ever reached the Master. As one saint puts it "Tears and weeping in love is a ladder to reach Him."

In Sanskrit, there is a saying: *Balanam rodanam balam*, weeping is the strength of the child. When the child weeps bitterly, the mother gives him milk. Similarly, saints tell us, unless we weep bitterly, the Master does not appear and come to our succour. We should be singular in our devotion, singular in our purpose, singular in our life's ideal and mission of service and devotion to the Master

THE PATH OF LOVE AND DEVOTION

Love is a quality of the soul. Just as only a few people can realise that their self is the embodiment of the Supreme Being, only a few can experience love. Many people tried to understand love, fought fierce battles for the establishment of their religious order which, they claimed, was based on love. It is not love but only a negation of it. Because in love, there is absolutely no distinction or difference of any kind. Love is a fascinating balance which weighs both jewels and stones together without any discrimination. Love is a fascinating state of being in which both the rich and the poor, the high and the low are given common seats.

In Buddhism, the way to *nirvana* lies through *jeeva-daya*, love of all life. (Buddhism aims at conquest of mind, of desires. Desires are the root cause of all *karma*. By shunning all desires, we can attain a *karma*-less life which is a prelude to a free spiritual journey.) And the practical way for the common man to express this love whilst attending to the duties of everyday life is to think lovingly, speak lovingly and act lovingly towards all mankind, taking God to be present in each and every living being. God is the One so many seek yet so few find. No amount of intellect can fathom Him. No amount of austerity can attain Him. Only when one loves Him and loses one's self in Him, He is found.

To adore a great soul, to worship a divine personality is *bhakti*, devotion. *Bhakti* is the most effective instrument through which the soul is elevated from its material moorings into the essential, into the Ultimate. Sandilya says that *bhakti* (devotion) releases man from the mundane thoughts and takes him towards the Ultimate. Sankaracharya lists *bhakti* as the most efficacious vehicle for salvation. *Bhakti* is the only instrument which can give man *jeevanmukti*. *Bhakti* is the search for spiritual identity. There is an element of attachment in *bhakti*-but it is of divine attachment, the type we should crave for. It is this attachment which causes detachment of all worldly attachments. Through this supreme attachment, we can bind the Lord. God can be bound only by devotion. In the *Bhagavata*, Krishna asks Gopis to "grant him release from indebtedness of love".

The devotee feels elated by drinking at the fountain of devotion. Meera's elation was abiding because the nectar of the lord filled every part of her being. That is bliss of *bhakti*. Guru Nanak says *bhakti* is the nectar, *amrit*, which makes us immortal.

In *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna says: 'If you surrender your mind and reason to Me, you will come to Me. Holding firmly the life-breath in the space between the two eye-brows and contemplating on God with a steadfast mind, *full of devotion*, you can reach that supreme, divine *purusha*. And the great souls who have attained highest perfection in devotion, having come to me, are no more subjected to rebirth'. And He adds: 'That supreme *purusha* in whom all beings reside and by whom

all this is pervaded, is attainable only by exclusive devotion.'

Love is the crown of works and the crown of knowledge. Perfect love is the key to perfect knowledge. Its supreme seal on life is reflected by man living in the world of God. Sri Aurobindo says : 'Love is the secret of change towards good, of looking up at the sublime. It is love that fills the gulfs of time and space. To live, to love are signs of infinite things. Love is a glory from eternity's spheres.'

Confucius says: 'To love human beings is the virtue of humanity; to understand men is science.' He adds. 'From heaven we have received the light, the enlightening principle which enables us to renew ourselves and all humanity to reach perfection.' Jnanadeva, the mystic from Maharashtra, says that there are four stages of the unfoldment of the mystery of life: *Nivritti* (negation), *Jnana* (knowledge of self), *Sopana* (ladder) and, *Mukti* (salvation).

To seek and reestablish identity of the self with the universal spirit, one must cultivate *bhakti*. Loving meditation of God is *bhakti*, according to Ramanuja. Undistracted devotion to God led Tyagaraja into supreme surrender and self renunciation-*anuragat viragah*. And in the process, he prayed to the Lord to remove the screen of pride and envy-*Tera teeyaga rada*, he said. A person given to egoism, pride, envy, anger etc. cannot prepare himself to set on the journey. He must clear himself of all ills and evils and become clean and pure. And then, just as a drop of rain-water falling in the shell, undergoes a process of alchemy

and converts itself into a shining, lustrous pearl, at the opportune time, the devotee receives the blessing of loving devotion.

Maulana Rumi says: *That* eye is fortunate which sheds pearls of tears in remembrance of the Lord; *that* heart is fortunate which burns itself in the separation from the Lord. Just as the life-giving rain rains, allowing new sprouts, new colourful blossoms, when the tears of the eyes rain on the soil of the heart, the time comes when the mystery of the Lord is revealed to the devotee. A Muslim woman-saint Rabia Basri is asked when she offers prayers. "When the Lord Himself comes." "How do you know when He comes?" She says, "I know when He comes, my eyes get wet, tears drip, my whole being experiences ecstasy, hair rises....."

It is said that he who knows others is wise but he who knows himself is enlightened. He who conquers others is strong but he who conquers himself is mighty. But it is not easy to snub one's ego and pride. There is an episode related in the *Bhagavata Purana* in which the two most revered of Hindu gods could not get over ego and anger. A dispute once arose among the sages, which of the three gods was the greatest. They approached sage Bhrigu to determine the point. He undertook to test the gods and went first to Brahma and omitted all obeisance. The god's anger blazed forth, but he was at length pacified. Next he went to the abode of Shiva and omitted to return the god's salutation. The god was enraged, his eyes flashed fire, and he raised his Trident weapon to destroy the sage. But the god's consort Parvati interceded for him. Lastly,

Bhrigu went to the heaven of Vishnu whom he found asleep. To try his humility, he gave the god a good kick on his breast, which awoke him. Instead of showing anger, Vishnu asked Bhrigu's pardon for not having greeted him first on arrival. Then he declared he was highly honoured by the sage's blow. He trusted the sage's foot was not hurt, and began to press it gently. Bhrigu then said, 'This is the mightiest god; he overpowers his enemies by the most potent of all weapons-gentleness and humility.' Therefore, saints teach us first to cultivate humility and gentleness. They tell us to be like water, which is so gentle that it finds always the lowest place and resists nothing, yet so strong that it is capable of overpowering all things. That is why saints tell us: Be humble, and you will ever remain entire. Be bent, and you will ever remain straight. Be vacant, and you will ever remain full.

Humility is the basic quality through which we can conquer our ego, pride and anger. Humility will thus lead us on the path of love and devotion. Paltu Sahib, a saint from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, says: 'In the court of the Lord, it is only devotion and love that are prized.' But how can one reach that celestial court? Where is it situated? Saints of all faiths tell us that it is within our physical body. Paltu says that it is in the eye-centre inside, something like an inverted well-*ulta kuan gagan me*.

Shintoism, the ancient Japanese religion of the Way of the Gods, says: 'Think not God is something distant, but seek him in your heart, for the heart is the abode of God.' The object of all spiri-

tual endeavour is to attain to the indwelling God. The differences of geographical conditions, historical background, linguistic complexity or nuances of expression do not interfere with the essence of spirituality. By whichever name we remember the Lord, He will receive our prayer and will answer it. The paths may be many, the goal is but one. Ancient Indians evolved a prayer which-to this day we mutter, without understanding its significance: *Akashat patitam toyam yatha gachhati sagaram sarvadeva namaskaram Keshavam pratigachhati*. Just as the water falling from the sky, finds its course towards the ocean, whosoever I pray, my prayer, will reach the Supreme Lord.

Poet Vemana said: 'Cows are of various colours, but all milk is alike; the kinds of flowers vary, yet all worship is one; systems of faith are different, but the deity is one'. What humanity needs is a teacher, an understanding path-finder who knows the way, who represents all faiths as one faith, who comprehends all expressions in the Tower of Babel as one expression. Verily, the teacher should be all-knowing, all comprehending. We remember the story of a Chinese Buddhist monk. Once, in the sixth century, a famous Buddhist *bhikku* was asked by the emperor if he was a Buddhist.

He pointed to his Taoist cap.

'Are you a Taoist?'

He showed his Confucian shoes.

'Are you a Confucian?'

He pointed to his Buddhist scarf.

Similarly, saints do not represent any religious system. The Sant Sadguru is at once a Hindu, a

Christian, a Sikh and a Muslim. In essence none of these, but he is beyond all these. Because, He is the one who has comprehended the Reality, the Eternal Truth. In Maulana Rumi's *Masnavi* we find an interesting story about the misunderstanding caused by the multiplicity of language expressions. It makes a pointed reference to such a confusing state and reiterates the need for one who understands the complexity of expressions and unravels the Truth behind them: "A man gave a *diram* to four persons. One of them a Persian said, 'I will spend this on *angur*'. Another of them was an Arab. He said, 'No, you rogue, I want *inab*, not *angur*'. The third was a Turk who said, 'I do not want *inab*, dear friend, I want *uzum*'. The fourth was a Greek. He said, 'Stop this altercation. I wish for *istafil*.' Then, they began to fight against one another, because they were ignorant of the secret of the names. Through sheer ignorance, they struck one another with their fists. If one who knew the inner truth, an estimable man versed in many tongues had been there, he would have reconciled them and said, 'The words of each of you lead you to contention and disagreement; my words bring you agreement. Be silent that I may be your tongue in speech. I will get you each what you want. But you do not know that all of you want but one thing-grapes. Only, you know the fruit by different names'".

Now, this is the malady humanity suffers from. We must seek a healer who would heal it in no time. We know that there are healers and healers. If several healers offer themselves together, namely "one who heals with knife, one who heals with

herbs and one who heals with the Holy Word-it is this one who will best drive away sickness from the body of the faithful". A great book of the Zoroastrian faith says that amongst all remedies that one is the healing one which heals with the Holy Word.

But before the treatment starts, the Sadguru asks us to behave and prepare, just as a father offering his son to take him on a pleasant vacation, only if he prepares well for the ensuing examination. The Sadguru asks us to sit in meditation daily and withdraw our senses at the eye-centre by shutting off the nine appertures and opening the Tenth Door which leads us on to the ancient and glorious Path. It is this Path that takes us to the Supreme which is the starting point of all that exists. The great Tamil poet Valluvar in his famous work *Kural* says : 'A is the starting point of the world of sound : even so is the Ancient One the starting point of all that exists.'

Beyond the Tenth Door, we see the Sun, the Moon and the star region. Once we begin to cross this region, the Sant Sadguru appears in His Radiant Form and stands by us in our journey forward. With His guidance we are able to traverse the uncharted ocean of spirituality. After that, we reach the *sahasra-dala-kamal* where the continual divine sound *Omkar* is heard. There is a lovely and beautiful lotus with a thousand petals filling the entire region with radiance as if from a thousand rays of light. We are told that there are a number of *rishis* and *munis* around the lotus like bees drunk with nectar.

The sound of *Omkar* is also described as *Udgeeta*

which has a unique capacity to pull souls towards it. In fact, this *divya-nada*, the divine melody, is issuing forth from the higher plane of *Trikuti*. When we set out to reach the source of that joyous melody we are confronted with two alternative paths—one, The White Path of *Dayal*, the merciful, and the other, The Dark Path of *Kal*, the negative force. Since the kindly Sadguru is with us, we naturally take to the right path. Then the sound of *Omkar* encircles us, pervades us and pulls us up. As we proceed further, we come to a narrow and crooked tunnel-of the narrowness of one-tenth of a mustard seed. Its shape is some what like the letter N. This is called the *Bunk Nal*. The Mind is still with us-with the jumbo-sized ego which makes the journey through the tunnel well nigh impossible. But, the Sadguru is with us. He knows how to lead us safely and surely. We reach *Trikuti*, the abode of Brahma, from where the celestial music of *Omkar* emanates. Many of the spiritual leaders could reach only *Trikuti* and only a few could go upto *Parabrahma*. Only Perfect Masters can cross this region and go further up.

Now, for onward journey, there is the need for greater effort by more intense devotion and meditation. The next stage is *Parabrahma*. Here is the Lake of Nectar, the *Amritsar*. By having a bath here, the soul sheds all the accumulated sins of the many births and becomes pure and pristine. The ancient sages described this as *Prayag* and *Triveni*. Guru Nanak calls it the *Amritsar*. After the bath, the soul becomes naked and acquires the brilliance of twelve suns. It is only then that the soul realises itself.

The journey continues and gets pretty complex. Although, the realised soul earns the passport to go to higher regions, all the radiance of the twelve suns of the soul gets lost in the intense and gloomy darkness of the *Maha Sunya*. And without the aid and kindly guidance of a Sadguru, one just cannot think of crossing this murky region. That is why, all the spiritual systems of the world concede the torch-bearing leadership to the True Guru. Now, once we are able to cross this region with the help of the Master, we are free to move in and out of it as we wish. Then we reach the *Bhramar Guha*, the cave of the bees. From there to *Sach Khand*, the Region of the Truth which is also called the *Chowtha Lok*, the fourth world. The prominent feature of this *Satya Loka* is its enchanting Veena music. That is the only feature that makes us recognise the *Sach Khand*.

However, our object is to attain to still higher spiritual regions and reach the Ultimate. Therefore, the journey continues. Beyond *Sach Khand*, we go to *Alakh Lok*, and from there proceed to *Agam Lok*. This is the penultimate stage. The end of the journey which marks a point of no-return, the state of merger. That is the *Anami*, the nameless abode of the Master of Masters.

This, in short, is the journey we have to set on. It looks so complex, so unnerving. That is why the Sadguru says that this path is the path of the courageous, the bold and the determined. And with all the courage and forbearance, if we do not receive the Sadguru's mercy, we can never think of coming onto the Path at all. Only, love and devotion to the Lord, manifested in the Sadguru,

can put us on the Path and lead us back to our Eternal Home. That is why Paltu says : *Sahib ke darbar me kewal bhakti, pyar*. In the court of the Lord, only devotion and love are prized. The saints know that we are prone to dragging our feet. They are aware that we fear the complexities of the Path that lie ahead. Jesus says : 'I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Live within my love When you obey me, you are living in my love, just as I obey my Father and live in His love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy.' Again, Jesus says : 'You did not choose me ! I chose you.' But we know so little about Him. Our endeavour should be to know Him and through Him try to comprehend the Truth which is within us. And in this endeavour, there are only three aspects of the vehicle---they are Faith, Hope and Love--and the greatest of these is, of course LOVE.

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